

Nicola Di Cosmo e Lorenzo Pubblici

Venezia e i Mongoli

Commercio e diplomazia
sulle vie della seta nel medioevo



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History. Themes

Nicola Di Cosmo and Lorenzo Pubblici

Venice and the Mongols

Trade and diplomacy on the Silk Roads in the Middle Ages

In the 13th century Venice was the dominant maritime power in the Mediterranean and the Mongols the masters of an immense empire that included China, Persia, Russia and Central Asia. The Mongol conquest integrated regional politics and economies into a continental space where trade and diplomatic relations flourished. Enormous possibilities arose from the union between the continental circuits controlled by the Mongols and the sea routes leading to Europe, managed by Genoa and Venice.

The meeting and connection point was the Black Sea, where Italian settlements flourished, a crossroads of people, cultures and goods. If the most conspicuous presence was Genoese, Venice was an active protagonist, with its specific challenges and realities. The relations between the Mongols and the Venetians are the subject of a reconstruction for the first time which clarifies the plots, relationships, difficulties and ambitions of both parties in a global historical perspective.

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Introduction

The thirteenth century opens in Europe as a century in which pre-existing conflicts show no sign of being resolved, while new political configurations emerge. To the great struggles between Christianity and Islam, and between papacy and empire, are added regional hostilities between cities and municipalities. But even more than politics, it is the evolution of the economy, in particular the expansion of trade, that opens up new horizons especially for those who had invested the most in strengthening and defending the sectors linked to mercantile activities.

With the creation of the *Stato da Mar*, already in the 13th century Venice shifted the direction of its expansion towards the eastern Mediterranean, which became the fulcrum of its political and economic rise. In the wake of the Fourth Crusade (1204), Candia (Crete), Corfu, Modon, and other islands were subjected to Venice, which quickly assumed a dominant position in the Aegean. But if Christian Europe remained both united in its fierce opposition to Islam and divided internally by disagreements of all kinds, the most profound changes of this century found their roots in remote parts of Asia, which opened up new spaces for commercial activities, favored new political circumstances and led to the acquisition of new knowledge.

The Mongol conquest, which began in the first decades of the century, brought unprecedented political subjects to dominate Asia, much of the Islamic world and the eastern offshoots of Christian Europe. Political relations, and with them the mercantile spheres, were radically transformed. The Venetian merchant found himself faced with a geographical, material and cultural revolution, perhaps even before an economic and commercial one, which required him to make an effort to adapt which put his resourcefulness and courage to the test. But this new world was full of opportunities linked to a grandiose project of integration of the various commercial circuits, from the Mediterranean to

China, in a single system, generated and supported by institutions and innovations within the Mongol empire.

The potential inherent in such a commercial revolution, which we can define as global, was only partially realized, and only in some places, but this does not change the fact that states, families, individual merchants of all cultures participated in it, with different results and weights. cultures of Eurasia, from China to India, from Persia to Russia, in various paths in which we find Christians and Jews, Greeks and Armenians, Muslims, Italians, Tatars, and other ethnicities side by side. If on the one hand we could interpret the history of relations between Europe and Asia in this period as a series of missed opportunities, not only commercial but also political - think of the many diplomatic approaches between the Mongols and European sovereigns that never came to fruition - this key reading would be dangerously reductive. Venice was one of the great protagonists of the Mongol project of reinventing the world through trade, and if the Mongols erected the scaffolding, the Venetians did not lack dedication, knowledge, passion and capital. Its merchants, like those of Genoa, must be recognized for their role as wise guides in establishing and managing completely new relationships with the new great power emerging from Asia, and in pursuing common goals with new instruments.

If Genoa and Venice were rivals and leading protagonists of European commercial expansion in Asia, their contribution had a different weight, albeit in an intertwining of inseparable stories. The differences derive from factors internal to each, but also from divergent, and not necessarily opposing, international political positions and objectives. Despite the perennial mutual hostility, the parable of their presence on the Black Sea, as well as the attempts to cross its limits, were sometimes dictated by political dynamics and historical events unrelated to the logic of competition. Therefore, if in looking at Venice we cannot avoid considering its relationship with Genoa, it is nevertheless in the relationship with the Mongols, even when it was mediated by other elements and interests, that we find the *raison d'être* of the Venetian presence on the Black Sea.

If Venice (like Genoa) had not maintained its position on the Pontic coasts, the collapse of the Mongol empire would certainly have buried its settlements, cut off from international routes and exposed to political turbulence that would have made trade impracticable.

Instead, for decades, both Tana, the main Venetian base on the Black Sea, and Caffa, capital of the Genoese colony system, continued to survive as commercial outposts, and therefore to attract continuous investments that would not have been justified by a condition of political collapse and economic.

The end of the so-called *Pax Mongolica* was therefore not the funeral mass of the

relations between the Venetians and the Mongol and Tartar lords who competed for the spoils of the Golden Horde. There was certainly a political entrenchment and a contraction of trade, but the bases established in previous periods resisted and were only eradicated by the Ottoman conquest of Crimea.

What we have defined as "the project" is the key to understanding the historical role of the Mongol empire, a role of creation and construction very far from the pure destructive force, also undeniable, of the first invasions. The depiction of the Mongols as an irresistible and ferocious human avalanche that has colored interpretations of the conquest of Russia, China, Eastern Europe and Islamic regions has been separated, in the historiography of the last thirty years, from the role of the nomads both as rulers of the regions conquered, and as promoters of cultural exchanges and social and economic changes wherever their influence extended. These were not always welcome, but almost everywhere forms of accommodation and mediation were achieved, often through religious and cultural conversions of the Mongols themselves, and the co-optation of local elites in the administrative and government apparatus. This was the result of a process of maturation from conquerors to rulers that required effort and intelligence, and which we find reflected in the testimonies of admiration and respect towards the khans present in European literature, from the Franciscan Giovanni di Pian del Carpine to Marco Polo and beyond .

The relationship between Venice and the new great Eurasian power in fact developed in a now mature phase of the Mongol government in the various parts of the empire, which no longer has any connection, not even psychological, with the dismay and apocalyptic projections of the initial impact. Rather, it is the fruit of positive attempts by European powers to establish diplomatic relations and mutual understanding, often dictated by political calculations. In fact, there were numerous diplomatic missions aimed at recruiting the Mongol military power for an anti-Islamic function. These attempts failed for various reasons, not least the fact that deep divisions had developed within the Mongolian political world which would themselves lead to irreconcilable rifts. However, if there was one thing that the Mongol rulers had in common, it was their favoring of commercial relationships, and offering conditions to merchants that often helped them overcome political obstacles. Trade and commerce in fact represented the most conspicuous sources of fiscal revenue for Mongolian governments.

As we mentioned above, contemporary historiography has reevaluated the active role of the Mongols in facilitating exchanges and movements of people, goods, and ideas within their vast empire. These studies, which we will talk about in detail later, suggest that "the project" inherent to the commercial transformation carried out by the Mongols was articulated on several levels, and does not take the form

simply as a good-natured and condescending attitude, but as a complex and far-sighted strategy within which it is possible to identify at least four different levels: logistics, finance, production and legal framework.

Logistical support to the merchant was given by the system of post stations spread across the territory of the empire already at the time of the conquest. Equipped with special passes, authorized merchants could make use of these support structures, and found reception facilities perfectly suited to their needs in the market towns. To this must be added the general safety guaranteed by local governments which, in obedience to the central authority, had made the streets free from the dangers posed by bandits and robbers.

From a financial point of view, the large-scale introduction of paper money in China (and the attempt to extend the same innovation to Persia) as a means of exchange accepted by all and guaranteed by political authority is downright revolutionary. If the same system had been extended across the entire territory of the empire, it would undoubtedly have had a disruptive effect on the world economy. This did not happen, but the need to find adequate financial instruments to encourage trade between different circuits saw Mongolians, Europeans, and Muslims involved in a common search.

On the production level, the Mongols greatly incentivized the production of commercial goods that had high demand not only in the countries they ruled, but also abroad, stimulating their export. The most obvious example is the production of silk in China, a commodity in demand in many markets which in itself served as an incentive for trade over long distances. The Mongolian taste for the exotic and the precious, and the creation of universal standards of what we might call court culture in the broadest sense, served as a driving force and filter for long-distance Eurasian exchanges.

Finally we see the legal aspects, such as the treaties and concessions that established in precise terms the regulatory spaces for foreign guests - tariffs and duties, extension of commercial settlements, rights and duties of merchants - guaranteed by the Mongolian authorities and the various diplomatic representations. This does not mean that relations were simple or frictionless. Although their respective jurisdictions were the subject of agreements and negotiations, it was the violations of these agreements, perceived by the Mongols as attacks on their sovereignty, that constituted one of the main causes of diplomatic ruptures and military clashes. However, the Mongols most often tried to smooth out and limit the reasons for conflict, contrary to what one might expect in a historical period dominated by religious wars, in the Venetian colonies and in general in all the European communities settled in the empire.

Mongolian. The potential tensions between different confessions were tempered by a choice of coexistence, the result of a tolerant, or at least indifferent, attitude on the part of the Mongols, who for example authorized Christian missionaries to operate freely, as long as they did not interfere with other religions. In general, a pragmatic ethic prevailed that favored compromise, reducing the most heated accents of religious fervor, and which was made necessary by commercial interests that often clashed with papal directives.

We therefore recognize the Mongol conquest as having the primary historical role that gave rise to the reconfiguration of Eurasian trade and therefore offered European merchants the possibility of erecting cities, building warehouses, and making them strongholds in foreign lands from which they could reach markets that had been inaccessible until then. Real and imaginary horizons opened up before European merchants which in themselves stimulated them to invest, explore and search for common ground with populations and rulers who were no longer threatening hordes, but reliable intermediaries, business partners, local administrators and political interlocutors. Faced with this new situation, the Venetian experience, perhaps even more than the Genoese one, was composed of two distinct parts: the sphere of the state and that of the merchant. This distinction is crucial for understanding the limits and purposes of the relationship between Venice and the ¹Mongols.

At the origin of the Venetian expansion on the Black Sea, in reality, we do not find the initiative of fearless merchants to discover new shores, but rather the state's need to ensure supplies and supplies of grain vital for the very survival of the Republic. The blow dealt to Venetian interests by the joint action of Byzantium and Genoa, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Nymphaeum in 1261, constituted an "existential threat" for Venice, which could not fail to be fought with great determination.

Hence, military and diplomatic efforts to break the blockade imposed by adversaries multiplied, just when the political map of the Middle East and Eastern Europe was changing irreversibly. From Constantinople and the Anatolian ports, Venetian merchants began to explore new routes and territories, while the state actively pursued a policy of alliances, but also of wars, in which the European and Islamic kingdoms, the seats of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, and the various local potentates, from the Italian municipalities to the kingdoms of Trebizond and Lesser Armenia, were all present in a very complex and constantly evolving chessboard. The Venetian state needed to secure routes, ports and markets also to make the profits that were the city's main resource possible for its merchants. The state, therefore, with its institutions and its offices, was entrusted with the political, strategic and military guidance of the territorial expansion of Venetian interests, and

of their defense.

Direct emanation of the aristocratic-mercantile class that controlled the levers of political and economic power, the state was obliged to support commercial activities both by arming galleys and intervening militarily in the defense of the interests of the Republic, and by conducting diplomatic activities aimed at expanding Venetian influence and guarantee its citizens advantageous conditions and protection. The "statist" model of Venetian expansion clearly defined the terms, and also the limits, of the intervention of public authority and the management of the interests of the Venetian community in Mongolian land, which on this basis justified investments in defense and diplomatic presence .

East of Constantinople, the radius of state intervention was essentially limited to the Black Sea area, the natural end of navigation, and to some important neighboring squares, in particular Tabriz, where Venice established its consular representation. The state did not limit itself to following the merchant in his attempts to establish relations with the Mongols and other states in which Venetian merchants operated, but moved in parallel with him, and according to sometimes divergent logics: not only profit but also defense of interests national. The loss of the commercial monopoly in Byzantine territory in 1261, the political and military aggressiveness of rival Genoa, and the growing vulnerability due to the difficulties of supplying grain from a politically turbulent hinterland, are at the origin of Venice's strategic expansion towards the 'Asia.

The state guaranteed regularity and protection to the Venetian settlements on the Black Sea, but always proved reluctant to go beyond that. The public authority and its representatives, in a certain sense, reached where the ships reached, but did not go further. The merchants who decided to travel the routes of Persia, China or Central Asia did so on their own account, or rather, they did so counting on the support, support and protection of the Mongols. In practice, relationships of dependence were formed like those that existed between all the merchants operating on Mongolian territory and their respective governments. This is, perhaps, the reason why little has transpired about the affairs of the Venetians and other Italian merchants beyond the Black Sea. The notarial archives and the provisions of the senate, as well as the diplomatic treaties, all come from the Pontic bases, beyond which an almost impenetrable curtain descends, and information becomes rarefied. However, we know that many Venetians operated beyond Tana and Trebizond from transversal documentation, such as wills, although rather rare. What is certain is that these travellers, alone or more often in company, venturing on Asian routes, could only count on

own forces and on the protection of the Mongol commanders and governors.

The other side of the coin, as we have said, is represented by the merchant, whose symbiotic relationship with the state we note. The thirteenth-century Venetian merchant was an exemplary model of a framework of economic development centered on commercial expansion, and some of the families who appeared in the Doge nobility at the end of the twelfth century had mercantile origins, such as those of the Mastropiero and the Ziani, who together with other great families of the Venetian patriciate – Morosini, Michiel, Badoer, Contarini and others – were regularly engaged in trade.

² That said, the merchant's space was defined by a private interest whose goals did not always coincide with the collective interest. Often in close association with family and corporate relationships, individual merchants were the spearhead of Venetian expansion in the East. Ship captains were entrusted with financial fortunes but also the burden of finding and exploiting commercial opportunities. The dynamism of the Venetian merchant and his ability to move, invest, and sustain long periods outside his homeland in search of profits was the key to the success of a state strategy which, however, had its primary representative in the merchant.

The success of the Venetians on the Black Sea could therefore not be conceived without taking into account the structural changes that preceded the expansion, and others that were the result of it. For example, the expansion of businesses leads to a qualitative change in mercantile activity, which is enriched by new subjects, such as assistants, accountants and on-site agents. Banks and bills of exchange were born, and also, from the 14th century, the first forms of insurance. In practice, the merchant increasingly became a modern entrepreneur, at the head of a complex and articulated enterprise.

If the state stopped at the ports of the Black Sea, Tana and Trebizond, and reached as far as Tabriz, it was the individual merchants who pushed themselves beyond these limits. The merchant, for his part, equipped himself with new linguistic and financial knowledge. In everyday practice, both a linguistic and commercial *koinè* was found. We know that the Polos communicated in Turkish and Persian, and the *Cumanic Codex* also contains a lexicon in Latin, Turkish and Persian. These were the essential languages for moving on the routes starting from the Black Sea. The case of Giosafat Barbaro is indicative, who recognized two Tatar slaves in Venice with the language that he himself knew. If polyglossia was a widespread phenomenon in the cosmopolitan environments of the eastern markets, this does not mean that we could do without professional interpreters and translators: the "Turcimanni" and "dragomanni" employed in the chancelleries of Venice in Tana and elsewhere. These drafted documents, were present in legal sessions and accompanied ambassadors on their missions and merchants on their travels.

With the collapse of Mongol power and the progressive fragmentation of political power, conditions became more difficult for the merchant, who could no longer rely on stable structures. Faced with new challenges and unprecedented political configurations, Venice recalibrated interests and strategies, and if it is true that the Venetian bases stubbornly resisted even beyond the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, in this final phase they were already largely emptied of their meaning. In the past. But if it is a descending parable, which ends with the withdrawal of Venice from the Black Sea, the main themes of this story, such as the connections between state and merchants, the ability to operate in often adverse territories, and the construction of colonies and commercial networks, already herald a new phase in world history. The Atlantic powers, who will soon dominate the ocean routes, will redefine and bring to fruition the (unfinished) project conceived by the largest empire that had ever been created, together with the most advanced expressions of European trade.

Historiography

The story of Venice in the Mongol Empire has a historiographical complexity linked on the one hand to the endless bibliography, more than a century old, on the Italian mercantile presence on the Black Sea, and on the other to the figure of Marco Polo, and the "great sea" of studies poliani. Furthermore, for about a quarter of a century new trends in the field of Mongolian studies have reoriented the role played by the conquest, with particular attention to the Mongolian contribution to international trade, relations, and commerce. This book places itself, if not at the centre, then certainly in communication with these three great historiographical areas, and therefore it seems necessary to offer some explanations on each of them, without claiming to cover every aspect, for the sole purpose of framing the evolution and the most important contributions.

The father of studies on Italian trade in the Levant, which includes the Black Sea, is certainly Wilhelm Heyd, who already in 1885 laid the foundations for the subsequent literature, with his enormous work on the sources and great synthesis of medieval trade. The collection of documents on "Veneto-Levantine" diplomacy edited by Georg Martin Thomas and completed by the Trentino (and Venetian by adoption) archivist Riccardo Predelli dates back to the same period, which covers the period 1300-1454, and includes not only the relations with Byzantium but

even with the more eastern powers.

In the first part of the twentieth century, the pioneering studies of the Romanian scholar (and politician) Gheorghe Bratianu definitively shifted attention to the Black Sea. We remember in particular his *Recherches sur le Commerce Génois dans le Mer Noire au XIII*

Siècle, from 1929, and *Les Vénitiens dans la mer Noire au 14^e siècle: la politique du sénat en 1332-33 et la notion de la latinité*, from 1939. According to the happy definition of Gheorghe Bratianu, often cited, the Black Sea In the fourteenth century, it became the turntable (*plaque tournante*) of international trade, a point of collection and redistribution of products that came from different areas and circuits. His research was fundamental and inaugurated a historiographical orientation that made the Black Sea an area of historical analysis of vital importance for the study of the European Middle Ages. Furthermore, Bratianu, like other scholars of his generation, moved in the shadow and in reaction to the cumbersome influence of the works and thought of Nicolae Iorga, a politician and intellectual of gigantic stature who had also dealt with the history of the Black Sea. Bratianu also carried out the first survey of the Genoese notarial sources produced in Caffa, which led to the edition of the first series of documents by Lamberto di Sambuceto (1927) and the masterly summary published posthumously entitled *La Mer Noire* (1969).

After the war, the field of research expanded to include numerous archival and documentary studies, such as Freddy Thiriet's work *La Romanie vénitienne au Moyen Age; le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien, XII*

et XIII siècles (1959). Of great importance were the - 1966). Other scholars, in the wake of Bratianu's works, have contributed decisively to the advancement of this field of studies. Among them should be remembered Charles Verlinden, whose research on slavery in the Middle Ages directly affected the Black Sea and Tana. The many works on trade and navigation in the Venetian eastern Mediterranean by Bernard Doumerc and Jean Claude Hocquet remain essential for anyone wishing to approach the topic.

Research on notarial funds, such as that of Lamberto di Sambuceto, opened new horizons towards the reconstruction of the Italian commercial organization on the Black Sea, and also to attempts at quantitative analyses. The growing interest in notarial and economic documentation has found its most complete maturation in the Genoese school of Geo Pistarino, and scholars of international standing have grown in that context. Their results were decisive.

Among them it is worth mentioning Anna Balleto, Gabriella Airaldi and Giovanna Petti Balbi. While on the one hand studies on sources multiplied, for groups of documents, and sometimes based on a single act, there was no shortage of syntheses. Michel Balard completed the work begun by Bratianu on the deeds of the Genoese notary active in Caffa at the end of the 13th century (*Gênes et l'Outre-mer*, 1973) and published the most complete study on Genoese Romania (*La Romanie génoise, siècle*, 1978). Thanks to the enormous work carried out in the Seventies, the French *XII and -début du XV^e* historian gave a decisive impulse to these studies on the Black Sea, giving life to many of the lines of research still active today.

The Romanian school continued to train high-level scholars such as Țerban Papacostea, followed by Virgil Ciocîltan, authors respectively of *La Mer Noire Carrefour des grandes routes internationales 1204–1453* (2006) and *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (2016). Ciocîltan, although firmly anchored to the tradition of European studies on the Genoese and Venetian presence on the Black Sea, is one of the few to have opened spaces to the Asian, and in particular Mongolian, dimension in the history of international trade.

The Russian school is dominated by the figure and studies of Sergej P. Karpov. Scattered across numerous essays and monographs – for example, *The Empire of Trebizond, Venice, Genoa and Rome, 1204-1461: political, diplomatic and commercial relations* (1986) – his works address in detail many themes inherent to the Venetian and Genoese presence in Gazaria and the broad lines of Black Sea trade. Karpov's contribution is also notable for the publication of unpublished sources in the series *Priĭernomor'e v srednie veka* (The Black Sea Region in the Middle Ages) since 1991, such as the proceedings by Benedetto Bianco, notary in Tana. The Russian school continues to produce notable scholars such as Evgeny Khvalkov, student of Karpov and author of the recent *The Colonies of Genoa in the Black Sea Region: Evolution and Transformation* (2018) and Aleksandr Emanov with his studies on Caffa in the 13th-15th centuries.

Alongside archival research there are also broader studies, for example the pioneering ones by masters such as Roberto S. Lopez, Robert H. Bautier, Benjamin Kedar, David Ayalon, David Jacoby and other medievalists, whose works are essential for placing the history of Venice's trade in a broad framework from both an economic and cultural point of view. Let us therefore say that the study of the Italian colonies on the Black Sea emerged during the 20th century as an autonomous subject of research, which today occupies a relevant space in the field of medieval studies.

The field of studies on the conquest and the Mongol empire, mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin, constitutes the third pillar of the historiographical framework,

and it also includes different orientations. Traditional historiography has favored a theoretical approach based on the contrast between the Mongol "impact" and the "response" of the West, and is represented above all by studies on the relations between the papacy and the Mongols and the various reports on the "Tatars" written by missionaries and diplomats Europeans. These studies have a long history linked to the names of Paul Pelliot, Jean Richard, Igor de Rachewiltz, Denis Sinor, and above all, among the most prolific, Peter Jackson. To these extremely erudite studies, we must add the studies on the Mongols in the Middle East and Central Asia, a field in which the names of Charles Melville, David Morgan, Reuven Amitai, and Michal Biran stand out.

However, the real historiographical turning point that allowed us to overcome the fundamentally philological structure of many of these studies is to be found in Janet Abu-Lughod's book, *Before European Hegemony: The World System 1250-1350* (1989). Without dwelling on the conceptual origins of the book, which see it in a critical position compared to Immanuel Wallerstein's studies on the *world system*, this work was particularly influential for placing the Mongol empire at the center of pre-existing commercial circuits on a global scale.

Although the author herself did not intend to intervene directly on issues of Mongolian history, her book places the Mongols at the center of a new world order, and their empire was interpreted as a fulcrum and transmission belt for new forms of communication between hitherto separate areas.

However, it is in the studies of Thomas Allsen that the most precise and timely historical definition of this global approach to Mongolian history is found. In his most important works, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (1997) and *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (2001), Allsen highlights above all the active role played by the Mongols in a process that we could define the "imperialization" of the territories subject to their sovereignty, the extent of which had never been adequately appreciated. Therefore, from passive facilitators of trade, the Mongols became active agents, who imparted impulses and stimuli with global effects in the construction of their empire.

Still others have studied the Mongols as a global phenomenon, such as Timothy May, author of *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (2012). The perspective that instead emphasizes the Mongols as agents of change and their imperial vision as a factor of transformation has inspired a large part of contemporary historiography, such as various essays contained in *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors*, edited by Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (2015).

The third and final historiographical strain that we want to point out is that,

also very vast, of studies on Marco Polo and his text. Polian studies represent a totally separate trend from that of studies on the Black Sea trade and, if the history of the relationship between Venice and the Mongols has often been overshadowed by that of Marco Polo, it is important to clarify that both Marco and his work were irrelevant fact in the conduct of Venetian politics among the Mongols. It is widely known that Marco Polo did not receive particular recognition once he returned from "Cathai", nor did the Venetian Republic initiate relations with China on the basis of his information.

Since the first appearance of the *Millione* (*The Travels of Marco Polo*) but especially after the sixteenth-century edition by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (*Navigations and Travels*), the fortune of the text is an undisputed fact. Modern studies, which start from the mid-nineteenth century, have concentrated firstly on the critical reconstruction of the text based on the different versions that have come down to us, and secondly on the publication of annotated editions, and therefore on a philological framework aimed at explicate the text, like the editions of Yule and Cordier, Pelliot, Olschki, Benedetto and many others. These are not the areas that interest us, as neither the literary quality of the *Millione* nor the presence of Marco Polo in China are in themselves representative of the relationship between Venice and the Mongols.

The most recent studies, following the publication of Frances Wood's book, *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (1996), are more closely linked to commercial and global issues. The doubt raised by the English writer on the veracity of the Venetian's journey generated various reactions.³ Today, a quarter of a century after the publication of the book, and following new studies, we can say this thesis has not been that⁴ The most authoritative work in this sense, that rejected. leaves no room for doubt, it is *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (2013) by Hans Ulrich Vogel, which corroborates the presence of Marco Polo in China and above all the reliability of the information reported in the *Million*.

The experience of the Polos and Marco's book, which we included in the first chapter of the second part, is indicative of the commercial knowledge required of the Venetians and other Italian merchants who ventured on journeys to unknown lands, and as such we wanted to report them, without making it the symbol of Venice's relations with the Mongolian world.

The structure of the book

We wanted to divide the book into two parts: a historical-chronological one and a thematic one. In the first part we develop, in seven chapters, the history of the meeting between Venice and the Mongols, reconstructing the stages up to Venice's withdrawal from the Black Sea. By "Mongols" or "Tatars" we do not mean only the Mongol empire, but also the its subsequent formations, which include the kingdom of Tamerlane and the various Crimean khanates, after the end of the so-called *Pax Mongolica*, as the political legacy of the empire and its substitutes continued to be strongly present in the eastern politics of Venice.

Any narrative of the relationship between Venice and the Mongols could easily be obscured by a single theme: the rivalry with Genoa, the dominating maritime power in Crimea and eternal enemy of the Serenissima. To prevent this topic, which is very popular throughout historiography, from gaining the upper hand, we have tried as much as possible to keep our attention firmly on Venice and its specific relationship with the Mongols.

The first two chapters describe two parallel movements: that of Venice towards the East and that of the Mongols towards the West. If these movements are initially independent of each other, they gradually converge. On the one hand we have Venice's need to counteract its exclusion from the Black Sea trade following the Byzantine-Genoese alliance of 1261.

On the other hand we have the consolidation of the Mongol khanates, the Golden Horde in Russia and the Ilkhanate in southwestern Asia, which transformed the Eurasian political map and forced the search for new balances.

The third chapter discusses the first phase of Venetian expansion on the Black Sea, and sees Venice still engaged in competition with Genoa and entangled in complex Mediterranean politics. We then arrive at the foundation of the main Venetian colony, bridgehead and strategic base in the East: Tana, on the Sea of Azov. The next chapter (the fourth) describes the period of greatest expansion, from 1320 to 1343, of Venice in the Golden Horde.

Not only are trade flourishing but there are important progresses on the diplomatic level, while the rivalry with Genoa, which has never died down, also enters a new phase, in which the need to coexist replaces the struggle for supremacy.

The balances created in this period will enter into crisis in the 1340s, and the fifth chapter describes its genesis and developments until the collapse of the Mongol empire (which was already in crisis) as a supranational reality. If the center of gravity of the relations between Venice and the Mongols remains the Golden Horde, the political resurgences are also felt on other levels, with the end of the Ilkhanate, and the end of the Yuan dynasty in China in 1368 which decrees brought an end to Mongol supremacy in Asia. The sixth chapter, therefore, addresses the problem of the readjustment of Venice in a new political climate, made up of new figures

emerging in the "Tatar" world, claimants to what remained of the Mongol empire, first among these Timur who tried to recreate the Chinggisid imperial vision. The seventh chapter recounts the twilight of Venice on the Black Sea, from the reconstruction of Tana after its destruction at the hands of Timur until the Ottoman conquest. This is not an inevitable decline, but rather ups and downs that demonstrate Venice's stubborn will to resist. Faced with the Ottoman conquest and changes as epochal as those that had pushed it into the Mongol East, Venice abandoned the Black Sea.

The second part of the book consists of four chapters that deal with more general topics. The first of these is dedicated to Marco Polo, whose journey to Cathay represents a unique and fundamental moment in the history of knowledge of Asia in Europe. We interpreted it as a fact in itself: not an episode organic to the relationship between Venice and the Mongols but rather a moment of encounter between the culture of the Venetian merchant and the Mongolian and Chinese mercantile culture, focusing on those chapters of his book which they present us with a glimpse of the practices and institutions that regulated trade and taxation. As we have already observed, the precision of the information reported by Marco Polo has been confirmed by recent economic studies, which make use of evidence based on Chinese sources. The uniqueness of this information is due precisely to the commercial preparation of the Venetian, which other travelers such as Ibn Battuta or Odorico da Pordenone did not possess. If the cultures were different, Marco Polo, with his acute observations, shows us that they are not incommunicable universes. The ninth chapter is dedicated to the new geography of trade and innovations in means of transport: routes, ports, and ships. We also wanted to include the legal and diplomatic tools necessary to formalize relations with the Mongols, otherwise destined to remain in a legal limbo in which each merchant would have had to negotiate on his own, and without any state assistance. A separate discussion was also made on the forms of association between traders and investors which allowed capital to reach even remote corners of the commercial maps. The tenth chapter is dedicated to the instruments of exchange.

Among these, the linguistic knowledge that the merchant equips himself with is essential, sometimes learning the rudiments of oriental languages, but more often relying on interpreters and translators. If medieval Latin was the main *lingua franca* in Europe, traveling east from Constantinople crossed a linguistic border where the languages of trade were different, but certainly dominated by Turkish (Cumanic) and Persian. It is above all in the field of financial instruments that important innovations matured in this period, with the minting of new currencies intended to facilitate exchanges over long distances and through

non-integrated monetary ones. The problem of equalization between various systems also concerns weights and measures. If in medieval Italy each city used different meters, which also varied according to categories of goods, beyond the Italian borders the problems multiplied disproportionately. In the absence of an international standardization process, the merchant was forced to resort to equivalences and comparisons, but it was certainly the experience acquired during many journeys that made the exchange possible in very different regimes. The last chapter is dedicated to exported and imported goods and merchandise. It seemed right to us to focus on some goods in particular, which occupy an important place in international trade, such as wheat, silk and slaves. A panoramic view of the goods that traveled on Venetian ships is essential in order to appreciate the changes undergone by trade during the various phases of the Venetian presence in Asia. The tables that accompany this chapter do not claim to be complete, but rather serve to give a general illustration of the relevance of Asian trade in the general economy of Venice.

The idea of writing a book on Venice and the Mongols was born in the context of a conference that we organized, together with Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, at Villa La Pietra, the Florentine headquarters of New York University, on the theme *The Mongol Empire in World History*, in 2009. A heartfelt thanks is due to Zvi, who made this meeting possible. With the participants, among whom we remember Marco Bais, Michal Biran, Marie Favereau, Roman Hautala, Sergej P. Karpov and Hodong Kim, the most advanced aspects of Mongolian studies were discussed, and the idea of a new history of the relationship was proposed between Europe and the Mongols. For these conversations we are deeply grateful.

About four years ago we finalized the project that led to this book, which focuses on the role and history of Venice. This is not the last word on this subject, but we hope instead it constitutes a starting point, since a book on Venice and the Mongols has not been written. Sincere thanks are due to the archivists and librarians who allowed us access to documentary sources and rare literature. The dedication and constant availability of the staff of the State Archives of Venice were very important, especially in a period, like the past two years, which put everyone's patience to the test. We also thank the extremely prompt and knowledgeable staff of the Historical Studies and Social Science Library of the Institute for

Advanced Study for providing us with unobtainable studies and documents.

Among the people who contributed with ideas and advice, we would like to first thank Sergio Tognetti for reading the economic part, and Eugenio Burgio, who resolved some doubts for us. We also thank Tiziana Lippiello, friend and rector of Ca' Foscari, for encouraging and supporting the idea of writing a book on Venice and Asia from the beginning.

We would like to express our gratitude in particular to all the staff of the Viella publishing house, and in particular to Cecilia Palombelli and Graziana Forlani, because they believed in our project and for having supported it with great generosity in every phase. Their support and work were essential to the production of our book.

Any errors, oversights, or inaccuracies remain, of course, our sole responsibility.

1. Di Cosmo, *Mongols and Merchants on the Black Sea Frontier*, pp. 402-406; By Cosmo, *Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire*, pp. 99-106.

2. Caravale, *The institutions of the Republic*, pp. 304-305.

3. See for example the long review by de Rachewiltz (*Marco Polo went to China*, pp. 34-92).

4. Allsen, *The Cultural Worlds of Marco Polo*, pp. 375-383. Jackson, *Marco Polo and His 'Travels'*, pp. 82-101.

THE

Politics, economy and society

1. Venice and the East from its origins to its arrival on the Sea Black

1. *Venice, the East and the Byzantine Empire until the Fourth Crusade (1204)*

In the second book of his *Estoires de Venise*, the Venetian chronicler Martin da Canal, active until 1275, wrote that provisions in his city became very expensive and therefore the authorities sent convoys to the most remote corners of the world, as far as the Mongol Empire.

¹ The oriental vocation of Venice was established almost from the origins of the city and was consolidated over the centuries, thanks above all to its relationship with the Byzantine Empire and the expansion of Venice into the islands and ports of the Aegean. This propensity towards the East is the essential premise of the relationship that was established between Venice and the Mongol khans, even if it was not the only driving force. To frame, in broad terms, the eastern expansion of Venice, which was built above all in the context of the connection with the Byzantine Empire, we summarize the main stages.

Until the end of the 8th century, Venice remained under Byzantine rule, but the balance of power between the two states began to change in the following century when the city increased its military potential to become the armed wing of Byzantium in the Adriatic. In the same centuries the Frankish empire extended its control over the Venetian region and Venice became the subject of disputes between the two great centers of power for decades.

² In 809 the Byzantine fleet entered the upper Adriatic to consolidate control of the lagoon.

³ In 812, in Aachen, the two empires, Frankish and Byzantine, signed a peace agreement in which the former left the Venetians to its rival who, for its part, recognized Charlemagne's imperial dignity. Having returned to the Byzantine orbit, Venice enjoyed wide political freedom. From the middle of the 9th century the government of the city

he oriented his policy towards strengthening the fleet and employed huge resources in the development of long-distance trade. The Venetian navy was decisive in defeating piracy, which threatened maritime traffic from the Dalmatian coasts. Furthermore, by virtue of its support for Venice acquired both economic ⁴ the fleet between Venice and Constantinople. Byzantine, advantages and a privileged position in trade within the empire.

The weight of Venice in Byzantine foreign policy increased further during the 10th century, with the political stabilization of the Islamic world, which opened new markets to international trade. Venetian merchants regularly frequented Egyptian ports, then under the rule of the Shia Islamic Fatimid dynasty. These had invested huge resources to gain control of the large flow of goods from India, traditionally traded in the ports of the Persian Gulf.

⁵ Venetians, Amalfitans and Genoese settled in Jerusalem, were present in the ports of Alexandria, Damietta, Tripoli and Antioch, and extended their commercial activities into Syria. The shift of the Mediterranean economic and commercial center of gravity to the coasts of Northern Africa ⁶ facilitated, largely due to the investments of the Fatimids, the trade of "subtle" goods. Among them stood out spices – pepper, especially

ginger, cinnamon and cloves – and products for the textile industry. ⁷ Venice was also open to foreign merchants, and by virtue of the increasingly frequent relations with the Islamic world, the influx of oriental merchants, particularly from North Africa and Syria, increased.

The "commercial revolution" of the 13th century was the outcome of a long process that had begun ⁸ at least three centuries earlier. It was above all the ⁹ Italian cities most equipped and implement the innovations that benefited from it . maritime, and with it the prepared to merchant navy, were at the same time an instrument and consequence of this new course of the European economy, whose growth was largely determined by relations with the East. The presence on the eastern Mediterranean markets and the exposure to Greek-Arab culture were a further development factor that Venice enjoyed and of which it was a protagonist.

¹⁰

Economic growth was accompanied by demographic growth. Between the end of the 10th and the first decades of the 11th century the population increased both in the cities and in the countryside. With the increase in population, food needs also grew, which corresponded to the increase in agricultural production. In large regions of continental Europe, deforestation works were necessary to encourage the expansion of agriculture and the uncultivated woods and moors left space for cultivation. The growth meant that the need for wood for construction, heating and industrial and military uses increased throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Thanks to the river transport network made up of the Adige, Piave, Tagliamento, Brenta and other smaller rivers, Venice had ¹¹ access to large resources of wood from the surrounding regions, which it partly traded in the East in exchange for precious metals and luxury goods.

The demographic increase also gave rise to a flourishing proto-industrial economy and the multiplication of production centers which led to an increase in exports and therefore an increasing use of regional and foreign markets. Trade favored the development of peaceful relations between Venice and the Islamic world throughout the 10th century. Among the products that the Venetians bought in the

Islamic regions there were wheat, fine fabrics, silk, spices, weapons and slaves. ¹²

However, exchanges with Muslims were part of an international framework which became increasingly uncertain from the second half of the 10th century. What generated the uncertainty was above all the worsening of relations between the caliphate and Byzantium. Venice chose to remain faithful to the empire, and twice, in 960 and 971, the city authorities prohibited the importation of weapons and slaves from Islamic markets. ¹³ It was with the election of the noble Pietro Orseolo (ca 920-987) as doge that the balance of power between Venice and Constantinople began to change. The military campaigns conducted by Emperor Basil II (r. 976-1025) against the Bulgarians in the Balkans had required such a military and financial effort that the Byzantines had to ask the lagoon city for help in defense and control of the sea.

¹⁴ In 992 the two states ratified a collaboration treaty which confirmed freedom of trade for Venetian ships throughout the empire.

¹⁵ Venice obtained advantageous customs tariffs and commercial rights from the Byzantines, probably on the basis of pre-existing conditions, as they were signed "according to ancient custom". ¹⁶ The importance achieved by the city in relations with Byzantium is confirmed by the fact that only the *logothete of the drome*, the high official closely linked to the emperor, had the right to board the ships in fact, although still formally Venetian subjects, to inspect them. documents the Venetians are ¹⁷ of the empire and foreigners (*extranei*), in official defined as loyal allies. ¹⁸

At the dawn of the 11th century, Venice had become the link between Western Europe and the Byzantine East, and the only maritime power capable of providing an adequate war fleet to the *basileús* to protect Adriatic trade, not only to the north, in the area of most direct influence of the lagoon city, but also to the south, up to the Apulian coasts. In 1002, Venetian warships intervened in the waters off Bari to protect the city from Arab attack. ¹⁹ In the same years Venice began commercial penetration into the ports of Istria and Dalmatia, from which it could access

directly to the Balkans.

The Norman invasion of southern Italy accelerated Venice's expansion in the East. Since 1071, led by Robert Guiscard, the Normans had successively conquered some of the most important ports in the Mediterranean, including Bari, Amalfi and Salerno and in 1081 they aimed

headed for Durazzo, in today's Albania, determined to conquer Constantinople. ²⁰

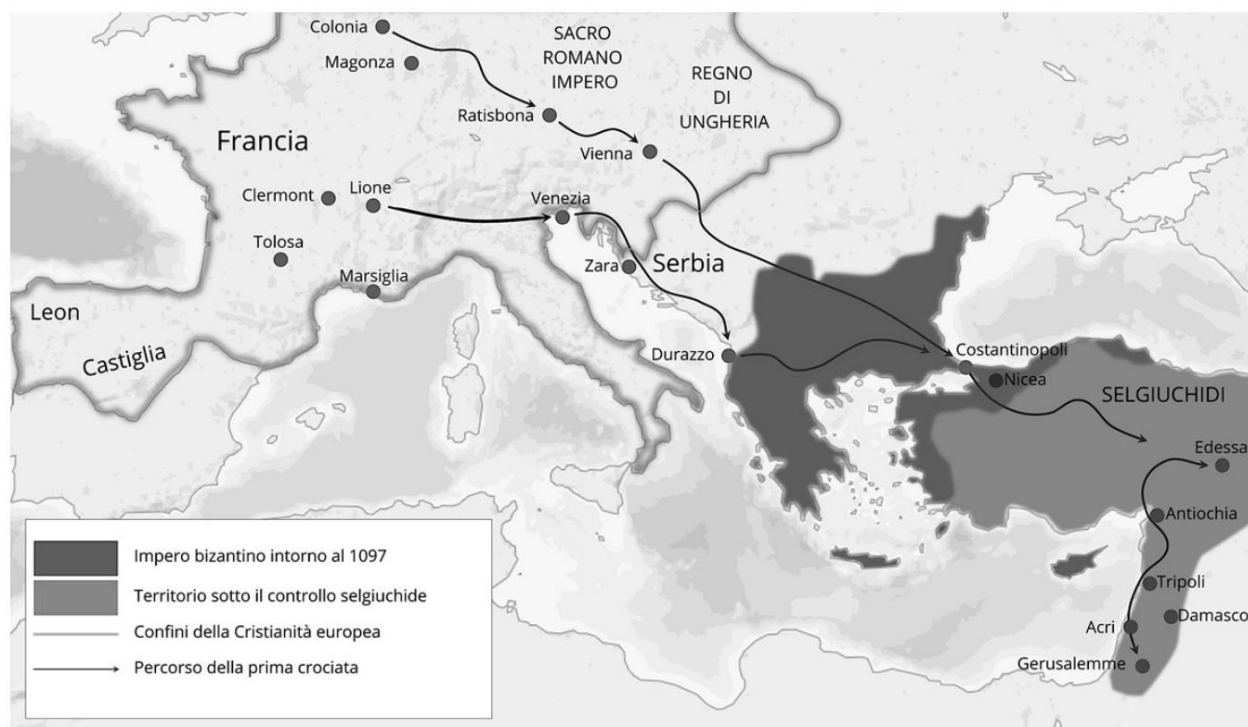
In those years the Byzantine Empire was in serious financial and military difficulties. In Italy, Pope Nicholas II (d. 1061) had entered into an alliance agreement with the Normans, to whom he had formally recognized the duchies of Puglia, Calabria and Sicily (1059).

²¹ The conquest of Southern Italy by the Altavilla forced Byzantium to abandon the peninsula. On the eastern side, the collapse, in 965, of the Turkish khanate of the Khazars (which had extended between the Caspian Sea and Rus' since the 6th century), had favored the migrations of Central Asian nomads to Eastern Europe.

²² In 1071 the Seljuk Turks completed the conquest of the Anatolian peninsula after defeating the Byzantine army at Manzikert. ²³ The Byzantine emperor Alexius I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118), who ascended to the throne in 1081, asked ~~for~~

assistance from Venice, which for its part had every interest in stopping the Norman advance for strategic reasons and because many Venetian citizens ²⁴ resided in Durres.

— In exchange for the Venetian military commitment, Alexios allowed Venetian merchants to operate throughout the entire territory of the empire, including the capital, without tax obligations or other restrictions. ²⁵ In practice, with the provision issued by Alexios I, Venice established itself permanently in the empire with its economic and financial apparatus, benefiting from privileges that a foreign power had never enjoyed in Byzantium. The Venetians established a neighborhood in Constantinople governed by their podestà (bailo), with houses, churches, a bakery, warehouses and a mill. ²⁶ Although the Venetian fleet was defeated by the Norman one (1084), the advantages obtained in Byzantine territory were not revoked. On the contrary, in the following years the Venetian presence in Byzantium grew further precisely thanks to those privileges and in particular by virtue of tax exemptions even more favorable than those granted to the Byzantine merchants themselves. All this favored the creation of a monopolistic commercial regime.



Map 1. The First Crusade (1096-1098)

The international political climate and Venice's position in Constantinople were transformed by the Crusades. In 1095 Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont called the crusade against the Muslims who threatened the holy places and all of Christianity. The news of the crusade to conquer Jerusalem, announced in a climate of renewed religious fervor, soon spread throughout Europe. After Lent in 1096, masses of people who left from all corners of the continent, including gangs of desperate men, war professionals, and nobles in search of merit, headed towards Constantinople, the agreed gathering point.

Initially, Venice took a secluded position so as not to alter the political balance and protect the positions it had acquired in the Middle East. After 1120, however, he intervened directly in support of Baldwin I of Boulogne, king of Jerusalem (ca 1058-1118), aware of the commercial advantages that control of the Holy Land - Acre and Jerusalem in particular - could guarantee. In 1123, the Venetian fleet headed towards the Palestinian coast, and after facing the Fatimid navy in front of Ashkelon, headed towards the coasts of the kingdom of Jerusalem. The Christian allies therefore decided to attack the city of Tiro which, after three months of harsh siege, fell. The promises of extensive commercial privileges made by Baldwin to Venice were all kept [27](#) The new Venetian activism was and ratified in a treaty of August 1126.

anti-Byzantine desire for revenge disguised as crusader zeal. It followed the rupture that had taken place with the Byzantine emperor John II, who in 1118 had revoked the privileges granted by his father Alexios I in [28](#). The Venetian government had reacted first through diplomatic channels and then with force, forcing Byzantium, in prey to a persistent economic crisis, to give in. [29](#) In the peace treaty signed in 1126 John II restored all the privileges already granted in 1082. —

[30](#) While accepting Venice's conditions, John II tried to mitigate the defeat and granted similar privileges to Genoa and Pisa. The Serenissima thus lost its monopolistic and hegemonic position. The following years were characterized by a succession of agreements, ruptures, threats and conflicts between all those involved. In general, Italian merchants increased their presence in Constantinople, and in the Venetian-Byzantine treaty of March 1148 it was stipulated that the neighborhood in which they resided was expanded.

[31](#)

Despite competition from Genoa and Pisa, in the mid-12th century the ships of Venice sailed the seas of the eastern Mediterranean, from the Adriatic to the Aegean, essentially unchallenged. If until those years the ships of the Serenissima had regularly frequented the ports of Halmyros, Durazzo, Sparta and Thebes, from around 1150 the Venetians also began to settle in Cyprus, Crete and Asia Minor: Arta, Smyrna, Adramyttion. Furthermore, in the cities under Byzantine jurisdiction, the Venetian presence grew from year to year, merging more and more with local society, thanks to mixed marriages and investments in local businesses.

From the mid-12th century, the scope of Venetian merchants expanded further, while the economic and political crisis in Byzantium worsened.

During the regency of Manuel I (r. 1143-1180) the empire went through a period of unprecedented difficulty due to frequent military interventions to reinforce and pacify the borders which had drained its resources. If Italian merchants had the opportunity to continue to expand their presence in the capital, on the one hand this caused discontent among the population, on the other hand rivalries between the Venetians and Genoese flared up. In 1170, the former were blamed for a fire in the Genoese district of Galata, although without certain proof. The emperor ordered Venice to pay for the damages, but the Venetian authorities, in response, threatened military retaliation.

[32](#) In this climate of tension, on 12 March 1171 Manuel ordered that all the Venetians residing in the empire - be arrested and their goods —

— over ten thousand in the capital alone

[33](#)

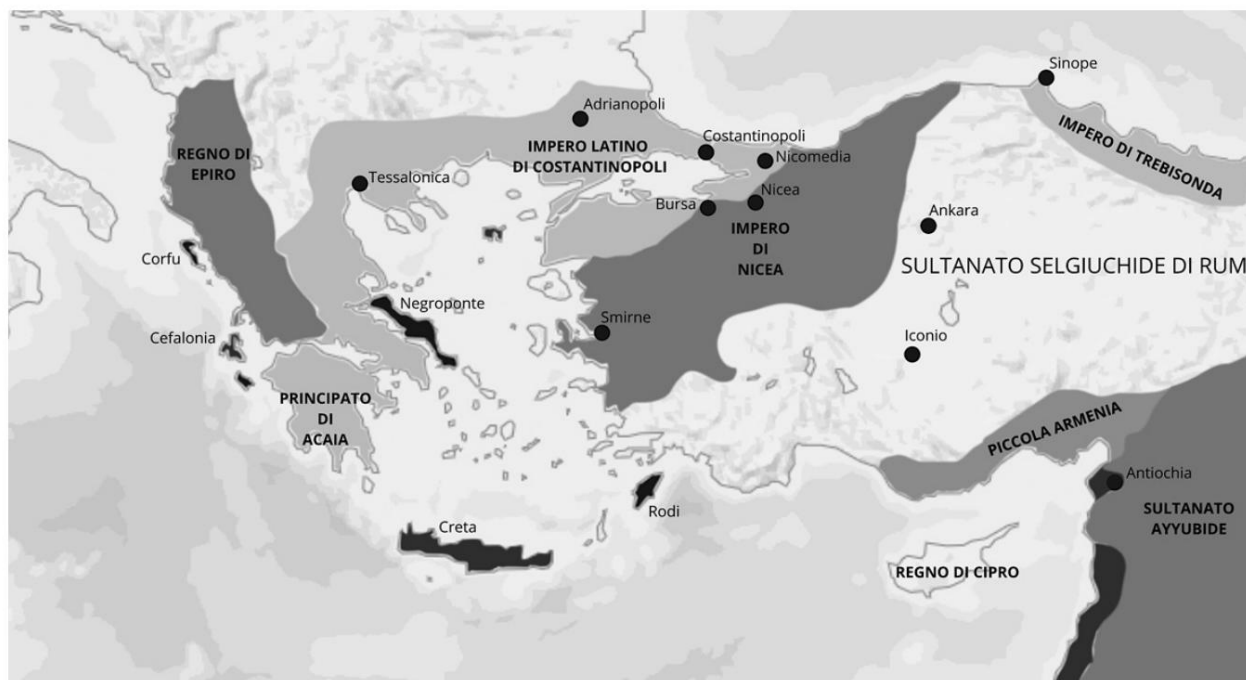
confiscated. The Venetian government reacted immediately, and in September of the same year the war fleet set sail from Venice for Constantinople, but

the attempt to resolve the issue with weapons failed, and Doge Michiel, upon his return to Venice, was assassinated. ³⁴ The events of 1171 further fueled the Venetians' resentment towards Constantinople. The opportunity to take revenge wouldn't be long in coming.

In 1187 Jerusalem had fallen to the Ayyubid dynasty of Salah al-Din, Saladin. After a long war against the Latin army, the Islamic leader of Kurdish origins (he was born in Tikrit in 1137) had also taken Acre, thus establishing a continuous territorial band from Egypt to Palestine and ensuring control of the most important and profitable commercial arteries of the Middle East. The damage caused to European Latinity was such that Pope Gregory VIII did not hesitate to call Christianity to the Third Crusade. The most prestigious sovereigns of Europe participated in it, including the king of England Richard the Lionheart and the German emperor Frederick I, and yet the crusade had no certain results and the reconquest of Jerusalem failed.

Since 22 February 1198, Innocent III (1161-1216), an energetic pope and proud supporter of papal supremacy over the empire, had ascended the papal throne at just thirty-seven years of age. The reconquest of Jerusalem was one of the main objectives of his papacy. From the first months of his office, Innocent III pushed for the organization of the crusade against Ayyubid Egypt. The preparations were facilitated, especially in France, thanks also to the work of the tireless itinerant preacher Fulk of Neully. The idea of defeating the infidel Ayyubids, recovering Jerusalem and Acre, together with the entire structural complex that revolved around the major ports of Egypt, convinced the French aristocracy to accept the papal invitation. The crusade was organized by members of the highest French nobility: the counts of Champagne, Flanders and Godfrey of Villehardouin.

Everyone agreed not to head directly to Palestine, but to attack Egypt first; however, the only state in possession of the means to ensure the success of a maritime expedition of those proportions was Venice.



Map 2. The eastern Mediterranean after the Fourth Crusade

The crusaders turned to the old doge Enrico Dandolo, a profound expert on maritime routes. Dandolo agreed to make the manpower and resources available to the crusaders to set up a war fleet, as well as 4,500 armed knights and almost 30,000 men in exchange for a large sum of money (85,000 silver marks) and half of all territorial conquests that the crusaders had successfully completed. The French delegation accepted Venice's conditions and the Pope gave his approval. The expedition left Venice on 29 June 1202.

Neither Egypt nor Palestine were the final destination of the crusade, which instead landed in Constantinople. The reasons that pushed the Crusader fleet towards a Christian city, albeit a schismatic one, have been the subject of debate for years. The lack of written sources and the partiality of those we possess do not [allow](#) us to reach certain conclusions. [conclusions](#). wanted to take revenge against the Comnenians for the events of 1171 and conquer the Byzantine capital to gain control of all the riches, immediate and potential, that this would have guaranteed him. But it is also possible that the diversion to Constantinople was the result of a series of contingent and not entirely calculated events.

Whatever Venice's initial intentions were, there were two main factors that determined the outcome of the expedition: on the one hand the excessive optimism of the crusaders in the initial organizational phases, and on the other the disputes

internal to the Byzantine court. The participation in the crusade was massive, but the money raised was not enough to pay off the debt contracted with Venice, which could therefore boast rights to the crusade. In Byzantium the political situation was in turmoil because Emperor Isaac II, supported by Venice, had been dethroned and blinded by his brother Alexios. Isaac's son appealed to Latin Christendom to intervene to restore the rightful emperor to the throne. In exchange he promised to pay off the debt to Venice once he was in power and to accept the supremacy of the Church of Rome. The crusaders discussed the opportunity to interfere in internal Byzantine affairs, but in the end Dandolo's line of continuing on to Constantinople prevailed.

A first assault on the city by the crusaders took place in the summer of 1203 and achieved its intended aim. The old Isaac II was restored to power while the usurper Alexius was forced to flee. But the real rupture between Western Christianity and the Byzantines occurred in April of the following year, when it became clear that the emperor was unable to pay the debt contracted with Venice. In the meantime, another usurper had seized power after deposing the emperor. It was Alexius Ducas Murzuffo, son-in-law of Alexius whom the crusaders had forced to flee, who had seized the throne by leveraging popular resentment against the Latins. Murzuffo promised his subjects that he would not keep the emperor's commitments to the crusaders. These, carried away by the fury and charisma of Dandolo, decided to attack the city and it was at this point that the crusade transformed into the conquest of Constantinople and the destruction of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The Crusader army broke the defenses of Constantinople in April 1204 and for days the inhabitants suffered the violence of the Crusaders, who deposed the emperor and divided the empire between themselves. The document that sanctioned the new order imposed on Byzantium, the *Partitio Romaniae*, is the mirror of Enrico Dandolo's policy, which had as its first objective the protection of Venetian interests. Following the capture of Constantinople, four new political subjects were born: the Latin Empire of the East, the Empire of Nicaea, the Despotate of Epirus, and the Empire of Trebizond.

All borders north and south of the Danube were redefined. Enrico Dandolo could boast the title of «dux ac dominus Quartae Partis ac dimidie imperii [36](#) Romani».

The sack of Constantinople not only established a new order, in which the Byzantine Empire effectively disappeared as a political entity, but weakened the defensive capabilities of the entire Christian East. The victorious West prided itself on having reunified Christianity and having established a large Latin state on the outskirts of Asia, but it was more of a large-scale plundering operation. The immense riches of Constantinople – the art, the sacred relics, the treasures

accumulated over the centuries – were raided and dispersed throughout Europe, and Venice rounded up the largest part of them.

The fall of Constantinople represented an extraordinary source of material wealth for Venice. The richest neighborhood of the city was occupied by Venetian merchants. The Doge was not so much interested in the hinterland as in the Aegean islands which, unlike the Crusaders, he knew very well and secured the most strategic ones: Chios, Modone, Crete and Negroponte. The latter in particular became the spearhead of the entire Venetian commercial system in the Mediterranean, located between Crete and Constantinople. Venice was therefore able to create a coherent network made up of islands and points of support on the mainland that connected the lagoon with Constantinople. Paradoxically, the conquest of Constantinople strengthened the Byzantine character of Venetian culture.

[37](#)

2. From the Fourth Crusade to the landing on the Black Sea

With the emergence of a new political order, new problems also emerged. In the years following the conquest of Constantinople, a rift arose between the motherland and the Venetians who lived in the capital of the former empire. The Venetian authorities in the Byzantine capital decided to choose their own representative without consulting with the Republic, electing Marino Zeno as podestà and entrusting him with extensive powers over the possessions acquired later

to the crusade.³⁸ His office became operational as early as June 1205.

[39](#)

When the news reached Venice, about a month later, the fear of a move towards independence in Romania grew among the city authorities. The new doge Pietro Ziani, elected on 5 August 1205, immediately adopted a more cautious policy and opened up to dialogue with the podestà of Constantinople, without retreating from the position of pre-eminence that his office gave him, assuming the title of «imperii Romaniae dominator ». From 1207 all Venetian officials in Constantinople, including the podestà, had to swear loyalty to the doge.

[40](#)

Although the Fourth Crusade seemed to give Venice undisputed dominion over the entry routes to the eastern markets and opened up unexpected horizons for its expansion, the new balances required years of adjustment. In that period the Republic found itself facing new responsibilities and internal and external difficulties which explain, at least in part, the long period of stasis in its expansion beyond the Bosphorus. To this must be added the profitable collaborative relationship that the city had consolidated with Egypt, the main area of exchange of oriental products which from the Persian Gulf arrived by land in Damietta and Alexandria, ⁴¹ on which many of the Venetian resources in the Mediterranean were concentrated .

The entry and control of the Black Sea and the major Asian routes did not appear as a priority for Venetian foreign policy in the early years of the century. The reasons for this apparent lack of perspective are actually easily understandable when we consider the fact that the Black Sea was not an area in this period that provided guarantees of commercial success. Neither the economic conditions nor the political situation of the Pontic hinterland could justify the interest of the Venetian merchants.

In fact, the Mongol conquest (dealt with in the following chapter) will be the catalyst of new energies that will animate not only the activities of Genoese, Venetian, Pisan merchants and other origins, but above all the investments of the Italian republics in the creation and defense of a stable and lasting presence, guaranteed and encouraged by the Mongolian authorities.

Beyond the dominant position reached by Venice in the Levant, other factors must be considered with the Fourth Crusade which dictated new priorities and presented new challenges for the lagoon city, first of all the rivalry between Venice and Genoa, which in this period became the main obstacle to Venetian hegemony. Secondly, new tensions emerged with the Western Empire, which competed with Venice for significant political spaces on the possessions of the former Byzantine Empire. Finally, it is necessary to consider Venice's position towards the kingdoms resulting from the division of the Byzantine Empire which, due to their geographical position and political opportunity, would later play a leading role during Venice's commercial expansion on the E

3. The origins of the competition with Genoa

In the first half of the 13th century, both Venice and Genoa were interested in strengthening their presence in territories from which they could obtain supplies of cereals and other basic necessities, as access to agricultural production in their hinterland was constantly threatened by wars, , and supply blockades. For this purpose, Venice colonized the Aegean islands, in an attempt to establish an economic monopoly and political hegemony which, however, came into conflict with Genoese interests.

Unlike Venice, the Ligurian city had secured bases in the eastern Mediterranean since the First Crusade, in which it had actively participated with its military fleet. During the 12th century, Genoa had established itself in all the most strategically important cities in Palestine. The Muslim reconquest led by Saladin dealt a very severe blow to the Ligurian Mediterranean commercial system. Therefore at the beginning of the 13th century the interests of the two

maritime republics collided and would lead to a conflict that, alternating with transitory truces, would last until the end of the 14th century.

The Venetian-Genoese competition in the Aegean was also exacerbated by the importance of intermediate naval bases for long-range shipping.

For the galleys of the 13th century it was necessary to sail during the day and avoid night navigation where possible. In the aftermath of the crusade, the authorities of the Serenissima concentrated their efforts on the security and defense of the trade routes threatened by piracy, and on the defense of the colonies in [Corfu](#), exposed to potential ⁴² Genoese attacks. strategic was the commercial system acquired with the crusade, strengthening of the

which was based on the control of the Aegean islands, Crete and the Peloponnese. ⁴⁴

Furthermore, the Venetian Republic was keen to consolidate its dominance in the capital of the empire, using it as a terminal for trade flows between East and West. ⁴⁵ In addition to the nascent conflict with —

Genoa, Venetian domination in ⁴⁶ In 1214 Romania was put to the test by internal revolts and threats. a popular uprising expelled the Venetians from Corfu, the gateway to the external Adriatic. Crete, important for the supply of grain, was one that surrendered to

colony intolerant of excessive taxation, often rebellious, ⁴⁷ In the having fought strenuously, in 1218. the islands of Corone and Modon Peloponnese, Venice, only after remained in Venice, while the rest of the territory fell into the hands of Goffredo de Villehardouin (d. ca. 1228), French nobleman originally from the county of Champagne, who founded the principality of Morea (Achaia) there.

⁴⁹ The loss of the Morea, with its rich oil and silk markets, was a severe blow for Venice, which used every effort, economic and military, to protect its colonial possessions in the Aegean.

⁵⁰

For its part, Genoa, having started at a disadvantage to Constantinople, had implemented a policy of progressive advancement in the eastern Mediterranean, causing clashes with Venice in the context of an undeclared war, and fought by ⁵¹ The first conflict between the two Genoese exploded for control of the island of Crete. In the aftermath sides mainly with the piracy. cities of the crusade the island was ceded to Venice by Boniface of Monferrato who had occupied it during the siege of Constantinople. Venice stalled and the Count of Malta, Enrico Pescatore supported by Genoa, anticipated it and took possession of Crete in 1206, provoking contrasting reactions within the local aristocracy, divided between support for Venice and that of its rivals. The Venetian fleet reconquered Crete in 1211, but it took at least another two years for the Venetian occupation to stabilize. This despite the Cretan population

it always remained reluctant to foreign domination and rebellions followed one another in the following decades. ⁵²

In the early thirteenth century the Venetian-Genoese competition was only just beginning. Genoa's expansion was persistent and effective and led it, from the middle of the century, to establish itself as a dominant commercial interlocutor on the markets of Syria and Palestine. ⁵³ In the Levant, the Genoese and Venetians competed for the most profitable locations under the more or less direct control of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. Both owned a neighborhood in San Giovanni D'Acridi, and the rivalry in these markets, very important for access to goods coming from Asia, did not take long to take on violent tones, which led to a rapid exacerbation and new political and alliances.

To gain an advantage, Venice entered into an alliance with Pisa which was openly anti-Genoese ("societatem et companionam contra Januenses") which lasted ten years and was later renewed. The treaty, signed in Modena (Ponte Saliceto) in July 1257, annulled the pact of friendship between the Tuscan city and Genoa, which until then had regulated relations between the two cities in ⁵⁴ The subversion of the alliances was at the basis of the Venetian-Genoese conflict which exploded in June 1258 on the waters in front of San Giovanni d'Acridi in ⁵⁵ from the name that the chronicles record with the war name of San Saba, of the monastery of the same name in the city. It was the first of a conflict that would last, on and off, and although interrupted from time to time by real conflagration peace treaties and truces, for the next two centuries.

4. *Between East and West: Venice and the empires before the treaty of*

Nymphaeum

Venice had been the nerve center of all of Western Europe for centuries for the trade of oriental products, thanks not only to its ⁵⁶ economic-commercial structure and the de facto monopoly it enjoyed in Constantinople, but also by virtue of the continuity and security on the inland transit routes guaranteed by the Germanic empire. However, the political stability ensured by the Hohenstaufen entered into crisis from the mid-13th century, favoring the affirmation of the Italian municipalities. Venice found itself forced to negotiate with Verona and Milan, which controlled the

new players, including the cities of Padua, ⁵⁷ internal land trade routes and mountain passes, particularly strategic for the transport of metals and wood. To guarantee an outlet in the heart of the continent – necessary for the functioning of the commercial system

Venetian, which has always been a mixture of long-distance trade and local markets - the lagoon city was forced to divert military resources to the political-commercial system of the East.

The conflict between the papacy and the Germanic empire accentuated the peninsular critical issues and made the position of Venice more difficult which, although it was not directly involved, had to orient its foreign policy on the basis of the struggles between the Guelph and Ghibelline parties. The Ghibellines, supporters of imperial supremacy, had enjoyed a general predominance over Italian cities thanks above all to the political activism of Emperor Frederick II. His death, in 1250, dealt a very severe blow to Italian Ghibellinism, which was further weakened by the defeat that his son Manfredi suffered at the hands of Charles of Anjou,

supporter of the papacy, in the battle of Benevento (1266). [58](#)

Since 1255 the Republic had been forced to face another emergency, this time in Negroponte, where the Prince of Morea William de Villehardouin (d. 1278) had rebelled against the domination of the Serenissima and had sought alliances between his rivals. [59](#) Genoa had intervened in favor of Villehardouin and, although in the end Venice managed to regain control of the island, the military effort had exposed the difficulties in maintaining the hegemony achieved in [60](#). This was also due to the weakness of the empire Latin of the East, which had never been a self-sufficient 1204. [61](#) organized center of power and whose extension, by 1260, was now reduced to the capital alone. This crisis favored the peripheral centers of power resulting from the division of the Byzantine empire.

Trebizond, an ancient city, took on the name of *empire* in the aftermath of the fourth crusade, after Alexios Comnenus, nephew of the emperor Andronicus dethroned in 1185 by a palace revolt in Constantinople, had settled there. When, in 1204, the crusaders took possession of the Byzantine capital, Alexios Comnenus took refuge in Trebizond under the protection of Queen Tamara's Kingdom of Georgia, assuming the title of *emperor and autocrat of the Romans*. The Komnenian project was the recovery of Constantinople through the control of the Anatolian peninsula. The army, led by David, brother of Alexios, was however repeatedly defeated by hostile forces which in those years were at least three: the crusaders, the nascent Nicaean empire of Theodore Lascaris and the sultanate of Iconium. David died in battle at Sinope in 1214, and Alexios was forced to concentrate his resources on maintaining Trebizond. To survive he had to accept the bond of vassalage with the Seljuk sultan of Iconium.

The sultanate conquered important cities on the northern Anatolian coast; among them there was Sinope, wrested from the control of Trebizond. However, the

Formal recognition of the acquired borders kept the eastern part of the southern Black Sea coast out of the fighting. The Anatolian Seljuks, although hostile, constituted a barrier capable of protecting the small empire of Trebizond, which lived in relative security, prospered and increased its weight as a political and commercial referent for the centers of the Caucasus and Persia, especially since the first The Mongol incursion of 1220 irreparably damaged the Kingdom of Georgia, which had always been the main political referent of the Trebizond empire, leaving the small state with increasing margin for maneuver. And the Mongol conquest, which we will focus on in the following chapter, was another determining factor for the growth of the Anatolian city. The Trapezumtine emperors leaned on the new conquerors and agreed to become their vassals, in order to take advantage of them and increase their weight in the region. The project worked to the point that in 1254 the army of Trebizond retook the city of Sinope, a vital strategic port for Black Sea trade.

The empire of Nicaea was itself a direct consequence of the fall of Constantinople and was founded, in the Byzantine provinces of northwestern Asia Minor, by Constantine IX Lascaris, who fled the capital. The idea of reconquering the capital and restoring the empire never abandoned the emperors of Nicaea who, given their geographical proximity, immediately took sides against the Latin enemy. The conflict took on greater intensity from the 1190s, when John III Vatatzes (1192-1254), son-in-law of Emperor Theodore, ascended the Nicene throne. Among the main antagonists of the Nicaean empire was Venice. The conflict of interests between the two political subjects was concentrated above all in the Aegean. John Vatatzes's plan to reconquer Constantinople involved control of the most important islands of the Aegean, especially Crete. In 1233 this was attacked by Vatatzes's fleet in support of an internal rebellion. Venice managed to prevail over the island's resistance only in 1236, after a conflict that was costly in both material resources and human losses.

The previous year, in 1235, the empire of Nicaea, supported by the Bulgarians of John II Asen (d. 1241), who had conquered Thrace to the north, had the Venetian forces, aided by directing its navy towards Constantinople. by an imposing fleet under the orders of the John of Brienne (d. 1237), they repelled the siege. The conflict lasted until 1241, when ⁶¹ regent of the Latin empire of Constantinople the Venetian ships under the command of Giovanni Michiel defeated the Nicene ones off the coast of Tzurullon (Çorlu), on the Sea of ⁶² Marmara.

— The Venetian victory calmed tensions with the empire of Nicaea, because the military operations had proved particularly expensive for both and because Vatatzes was threatened by the Bulgarians to the north and by the despotate of Epirus to

northwest. 63 —

Aware of the difficulties that the Nicene Empire was going through, Venice activated its diplomatic channels to pacify both relations with Vatatzes and those with Genoa. With the latter, Venice stipulated a truce in 1251 which ensured it a ten-year pause and the possibility of concentrating on strengthening its Levantine possessions. In the 1250s the city strengthened its control over the traditional markets of the Aegean and consolidated relations with new markets, in particular the Peloponnese of Villehardouin, rich in cereals and a hub for the silk trade.

The progressive affirmation of the empire of Trebizond corresponded to the territorial retreat of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum, the growing political stability of the empire of Nicaea and the increasingly evident weakening of the Latin empire of Constantinople. The decades-long existence of the Crusader state was largely due to the protection of the Venetian military fleet. Vatatzes's successor, the Nicaean emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, was pursuing an expansionist policy in continuity with that of his father and planned to retake Constantinople, avenge the offense of the Fourth Crusade and reconstitute the unity of the empire, but he had not never had the military strength to accomplish the feat.

To satisfy his ambitions he had to rely on a military power capable of facing the Venetian navy. The ideal candidate was Genoa. The conditions for reaching a positive conclusion to the negotiations were all there. On the one hand, the Byzantine hostility towards Venice which, after the events of 1204, was irremediable. On the other Genoa which, after the war of San Saba and the progressive weakening of the Latin dominions in the Holy Land, absolutely needed to establish itself on a permanent basis in Romania. To convince the Genoese authorities, the emperor offered the doge of the Ligurian republic the same privileges that in previous centuries had guaranteed Venice a monopoly on trade in Byzantium.

The agreement was sealed in March 1261 in the city of Nicaea, today Nif in Türkiye. 64 With it, Genoa undertook to provide both the military aid necessary for Michael VIII to drive out "the enemies of the empire" and a stable naval garrison to defend the capital. It was understood that the enemies in question were primarily the Venetians. The emperor was aware that only by expelling Venice from the Aegean could he restore the prestige of the Byzantine Empire and regain control of the region. In addition to commercial privileges, Genoa obtained that, if Michael VIII had reconquered the capital, all his rivals would have been removed from the imperial territory. Constantinople fell only in July 1261, three months after the Nymphaeum Agreement. Michael VIII took the city

alone, without Genoese participation. However, the burdensome offer made to the new allies was signed and the emperor had to honor the commitment.

5. Venice and the Black Sea before 1260

At the dawn of the 13th century the Black Sea, although it was a crossroads frequented by merchants since ancient times, was not yet fully integrated into the Mediterranean commercial system. ⁶⁵ In the first half of the thirteenth century there were less expensive alternatives to trade with the areas around the Black Sea, consisting above all of the Anatolian and Persian routes, and therefore, even after 1204, the Pontus area remained extraneous to Venetian strategic interests. In addition to the fact that the routes were not known, entry into the Black Sea had always been forbidden by the Byzantine emperors, and therefore sailing beyond Constantinople was still not very safe .

The existence and consistency of the Venetian presence on the Black Sea before the Fourth Crusade are disputed. There is no shortage of news of merchants active on the Anatolian coast and in Crimea, but they are sporadic and suggest individual initiatives rather than a policy organized and supported by the Venetian state. Venetians are mentioned in the late 12th-century Old Slavonic epic *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (*Song of Igor's Host*), but they could have reached the territory of Rus' by land, through the ⁶⁷ In 1206 there is news of a Venetian merchant, Zaccaria Stagnario, Carpathians. who formed a company with Pietro di Ferraguto from Ancona to trade in Soldaia, Venetian today Sudak, on the eastern coast of Crimea. Six years later Giovanni Bianco, another merchant, boarded a Provençal ship bound for Samsun, on the southern coast of the Black Sea, not far from Trabzon. ⁶⁸ Samsun was a lively and very well organized market in these years, but peripheral to the main transit routes which, from the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea, connected to Constantinople. ⁷⁰ of Mentioned for the first time in the 7th century *Cosmographia* anonima ravennate, Soldaia had been subject to the Byzantine empire for centuries, within the administrative district (*theme*) of Kherson, however weak the control of the Byzantine state over Pontus was.

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⁷¹ At the end of the 11th century the Cumans, nomads of Turkish origin, attacked Crimea and took possession of the city. ⁷² With the Crusader conquest of Constantinople Kherson ended under the domination of the empire of Trebizond, but Soldaia remained under the control of the Cumans until the Mongol attack of 1238-39. In these years the city was the hub

main traffic between Mediterranean Europe and the markets of Rus', the Baltic, Seljuk Asia Minor and the Pontic steppes.

The Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck, sent by the Pope to the Khan of the Mongols in 1253, had described Soldaia as the terminal where "all the merchants from Turkey who intend to go to the northern lands arrive", just as "all those who make the reverse crossing, from Russia and the north towards Turkey".

⁷⁴ Rubruck goes on to say that «[in Soldaia] those who come from the north bring squirrel furs and other precious skins; those who come from the south cotton cloth, silk fabrics and aromatic spices". ⁷⁵ We also know that Italian merchants based in Constantinople also frequented other cities in the Crimea and Rus'. The missionary Giovanni di Pian del Carpine mentions the names of three merchants, one Genoese, one ⁷⁶ In 1260 the Polo brothers left from Venice and one from Pisa, meeting in Kiev. here to Asia (see chapter 8). move towards the Caspian Sea and Central

In the second half of the 13th century, therefore, Crimea was configured as a point of convergence between the goods arriving from the North, those arriving from Central Asia through Persia, and the Western ones transported by Italian merchants based in Constantinople. But at the beginning of the 1960s these were individual initiatives exploited by merchants who had settled in Constantinople, rather than in a framework of expansion and colonization as was that implemented by Venice in the Aegean. Things were about to change and with them the political order of the entire eastern Mediterranean was changing.

¹. Martin da Canal, *La Chronique des Véniciens*, II, CLII, «si fu en Venise mult chiere la vitaille; et ne prquant Monsignor li Dus et li nobles Veneciens envoient their ships and it seems to me that the world is right for the Tatars". Information on the life of Martin da Canal is very scarce and reduced almost exclusively to what can be gleaned from the *Estoires*, which were probably composed between 1267 and 1275.

². The triumph of the Franks over the Lombards in 774 had brought a rapidly growing power to the Venetian settlement which constituted a dangerous neighbour, and pushed Venice to seek support from the Byzantine Empire, heir to the Roman tradition, but no longer in capable of effectively controlling a region as remote as the upper Adriatic. As late as 771-772, the Venetian Doge Maurizio was defined as «consul et imperiali dux Venetiarum provinciale». See Ortalli, *The duchy and the "civitas Rivoalti"*, p. 777; *Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi*, nr. 19, p. 713; *Documents relating to the history of Venice*, I, nr. 30, p. 49.

³. Ortalli, *The duchy and the "civitas Rivoalti"*, p. 778.

⁴. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 31; Curta, *A Note on Trade and Trade Centers*, pp. 267-276.

⁵. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East*, pp. 196-197.

⁶. Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, pp. 65-79; Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, pp. 90-94.

⁷. Among the products for the textile industry there were pigments for coloring, alum for fixing the color and raw materials such as cotton and silk. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History*, pp. 44-45.

⁸. To return to Lopez's happy definition, *The Commercial Revolution*.

⁹. Petech, *Les marchands italiens* and Lopez, *Venice and the broad lines of commercial expansion*.

¹⁰. Bautier, *Les Relations économiques*, pp. 268-269. On trade in the eastern Mediterranean and the role of Venice, see David Jacoby's recently published useful collection of articles: *Medieval*

Trade.

- [11.](#) Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea*, pp. 27-28.
- [12.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 21 and 37.
- [13.](#) In 971, a Byzantine diplomatic delegation arrived in Venice to formally protest against the commercial activity that the Venetians were engaging in with the Arabs, despite the fact that the city authorities had expressly prohibited it. The intimation of the emperor John Zimisces (r. 969-976) was peremptory: if the Venetians had not stopped the trade of war material with the Arabs, the Byzantine fleet would have considered the Venetian ships as enemies. Doge Pietro IV Candiano then prohibited any sale of weapons, iron, wood and any other material that was used to fight the Christians. Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 25-30; Ortalli, *The duchy and the "civitas Rivoalti"*, p. 767; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 37.
- [14.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 40-42.
- [15.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 36-39; Ortalli, *The duchy and the "civitas Rivoalti"*, p. 776.
- [16.](#) «Secundum quod ab antiquo fuit consuetudo»: Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, p. 38; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, pp. 22-23.
- [17.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, p. 38; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, pp. 23-24.
- [18.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, p. 37; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, p. 23.
- [19.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 44-45.
- [20.](#) Dermitzaki, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, pp. 62-63; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 56-57; McQueen, *Relations between the Normans and Byzantium*, pp. 427-476.
- [21.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 53-54.
- [22.](#) On the history of the Khazars, see *The World of the Khazars*. In Italian see Pubblici, *Cumani*.
- [23.](#) On the battle of Manzikert and its consequences see Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, in particular pp. 226-228; *Manzikert to Lepanto*; Nicolle, *Manzikert 1071*; Cheynet, *Manzikert – un désastre militaire?*, pp. 410-438. For the Arab perspective see Cahen's essay, *La Campagne de Mantzikert*, pp. 613-642, dated but still valid.
- [24.](#) Oikonomidès, *The Medieval Via Egnatia*, pp. 9am-4pm; Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, pp. 188-189; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 475; Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Age*, pp. 98, 104, 156 and 273.
- [25.](#) The chrysobol of Alexios I is from May 1082. Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 43-52 and p. 54; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, pp. 36-45.
- [26.](#) Pertusi, *Venice and Byzantium*, p. 12.
- [27.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 90-94; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, pp. 51-56.
- [28.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 77-78.
- [29.](#) Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, especially pp. 226-240; Gallina, *Power and society in Byzantium*, pp. 283-285.
- [30.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 95-97; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, p. 51; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 80-81.
- [31.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 109-112 and 113-124; Pozza, Ravegnani, *The treaties with Byzantium, 992-1198*, pp. 70-75.
- [32.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 96; Borsari, *Venetian trade in the Byzantine Empire*, p. 1003; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 200-201. See also Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 150-166.
- [33.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 98.
- [34.](#) Ibid., pp. 100-101.
- [35.](#) Information on the crusade comes from a few chronicles, that of Villehardouin, that of Robert De Clari and the monumental work of Niketas Choniates.
- [36.](#) Pertusi, *Venice and Byzantium*, p. 20.
- [37.](#) Ibid., p. 21.
- [38.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 152-153.
- [39.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. I, pp. 558-561; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 153.

[40.](#) Ibid., p. 154.

[41.](#) In 1208 Venetian diplomacy obtained the expansion of the colony of Alexandria, active at least since the 1260s. Relations between Venice and the Mamluks continued in the 13th century with ups and downs until, in 1238, the two states signed an agreement according to which the lagoon city obtained the maintenance of commercial privileges in Alexandria and its own consul in the city. Röscher, *The Big Gain*, pp. 238-239.

[42.](#) Angold, *The Fourth Crusade*, p. 152; Penna, *Piracy and Reprisal*, pp. 36-52.

[43.](#) In particular, it was Corfu that worried Venice. The island was a crucial point in the maritime line connecting the lagoon to Constantinople. To ensure its protection, in July 1207 the Doge Pietro Ziani ceded the *castrum* and "cum tota insula et perinenciis" to a group of nobles, including Pietro Michiel, Stefano Foscarini, Gilberto Quirini and Ottaviano Firmo, so that they would pay the costs out of their own pockets. defense costs. Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. II, pp. 54-59; Angold, *Fourth Crusade*, p. 153.

[44.](#) Crete was not only the largest island in the Aegean, but was the epicenter of the naval routes that connected Romania to Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 171; Jacoby, *The Encounter of Two Societies*, pp. 873-906.

[45.](#) Borsari, *Venetian rule in Crete*, pp. 21-25; Borsari, *Studies on the Venetian colonies of the 13th century*, p. 21; Jacoby, *The Encounter of Two Societies*, pp. 873-906; Necipoğlu, *The Byzantine Economy and the Sea*, pp. 437-448; Karpov, *The Black Sea Region Before and After the Fourth Crusade*, pp. 287-288.

[46.](#) On the history of the Despotate, Nicol's classic, *The Despotate of Epirus*, remains unsurpassed today . See also Magdalino, *Between Romaniae*, pp. 87-110; Osswald, *The Ethnic Composition of Medieval Epirus*, pp. 125-154.

[47.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 172; Angold, *The Fourth Crusade*, pp. 155-156; Gallina, *Crete fra Venice and Byzantium* 1989.

[48.](#) Thiriet, *On the disagreements that arose between the Municipality of Venice and its feudal lords of Crete*, pp. 699-712.

[49.](#) Villehardouin was the nephew of Geoffroy, author of the *Conquête de Constantinople* as the son of one of his brothers. On the principality of Morea see Shawcross, *The Chronicle of Morea*; Ilieva, *Frankish Morea*; Chrissis, *Crusading in Frankish Greece*; Giarenis, *Nicaea and the West*, pp. 206-207.

[50.](#) Laiou-Thomadakis, *The Byzantine Economy*, pp. 185, 187 and 205.

[51.](#) See the picture drawn by Balard, *The fight against Genoa*, pp. 87-126.

[52.](#) Borsari, *Venetian rule in Crete*, pp. 21-22 and 27-36; Ravegnani, *La Romania veneziana*, pp. 192-196.

[53.](#) Favereau Lille, *The Fall of Acre*, pp. 166-182; Origone, *Genoa and Byzantium*, pp. 42-46; Balard, *Colonization and Population Movements*, pp. 26-27.

[54.](#) Manfroni, *Relations between Genoa and Venice*, p. 363.

[55.](#) Musarra, *The War of San Saba*; Röscher, *The Big Gain*, p. 246; Balard, *Colonization and Population*, p. 26.

[56.](#) Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, pp. 141-142.

[57.](#) With whom Venice had already entered into war in 1234. Crouzet Pavan, *Triumphant Venice*, p. 129.

[58.](#) On the battle of Benevento see Grillo, *The eagle and the lilies*.

[59.](#) Mergiali-Sahas, *In the Face of a Historical Puzzle*, pp. 280-281.

[60.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, pp. 1-9.

[61.](#) Giarenis, *Nicaea and the West*, p. 212.

[62.](#) Akropolites, *The History*, pp. 202-203; Martin da Canal, *La Chronique des Véniciens*, I, CC. LXXX-LXXXIV; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 171.

[63.](#) The king of Epirus, Theodore, had been pursuing a policy of expansion in the Balkans for years and, after defeating the Latin empire in 1217, was gaining ground in both Thessaly and Macedonia. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 166.

[64.](#) The bibliography relating to the treatise of the Nymphaeum is immense. It will be sufficient here to refer to the study by Balard, 1261. *Genoa in the world*.

[65.](#) Karpov, *The Black Sea as a Carrefour of Cultures*, pp. 39-52.

[66.](#) Jacoby, *The Venetian Presence in the Latin Empire of Constantinople*, pp. 141-201; Karpov, *The*

Black Sea Region, p. 287.

[67.](#) Slovo recounts the battle of the Kajaly river which took place in 1185 and in which the army of Igor Svjatoslavič, prince of Novgorod' Sivers'kij (in the principality of Chernigov) and the Cumans faced each other. It is a very controversial text even if the most recent research seems to have cleared away any doubts about the authenticity of *Slovo*. See the edition cited in the bibliography edited by Edgardo T. Saronne (*Slovo*, p. 83): «Here [in Kiev] Germans and Venetians, here Greeks and Moravians sing glory to Sviatoslav and blame Prince Igor».

[68.](#) Balard, *The West, Byzantium and the Black Sea*, p. 47; *Documents of Venetian trade*, nos. 478, 479, 541 and 662, also cited by Cahen: *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, p. 166.

[69.](#) Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, pp. 74-76.

[70.](#) *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia*, p. 176.

[71.](#) Pritsak, *Sougdaia*, p. 1931.

[72.](#) Studies on the origins of the Cumans have multiplied in recent years. The most recent historiography attributes the ethnonym to the westernmost group of the Asian Turkic-speaking Qipchaq people. For a complete overview see Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*; Publics, *Cumans* and Vasary, *Cumans and Tatars*.

[73.](#) There is no unanimous agreement on the conquest of the cities by the nomads, and the Cumans in particular. More likely it was a form of control (of an extortion type) of the main transit routes that connected a specific urban center to the most profitable commercial arteries. It is a controversial point on which we refer to Golev, *The Cuman-Qipchaqs and Crimea*, pp. 23-108. In Italian see the aforementioned Pubblici, *Cumani*.

[74.](#) Rubruk, *Journey to Mongolia*, ed. Church, pp. 12-13. Rubruck travels to those lands in 1253. At that time Soldaia was in all probability the last Crimean settlement not directly controlled by the Mongols, since the Franciscan later states that he met "the Tartars" only after he had left the city (pp. 18-19). A few years earlier, another Franciscan, Giovanni di Pian del Carpine, had been sent by the pontiff to explore the Tartar people.

[75.](#) Rubruk, *Journey to Mongolia*, ed. Church, p. 9.

[76.](#) The Franciscan writes that among them there are a certain Michele, Genoese, and Manuele, Venetian and underlines that these, together with a certain Giacomo of Aciri and Niccolò of Pisa, are the most important (*isti sunt maiores*). But he adds that there are many other *minors*. Giovanni di Pian del Carpine, *History of the Mongols*, p. 332.

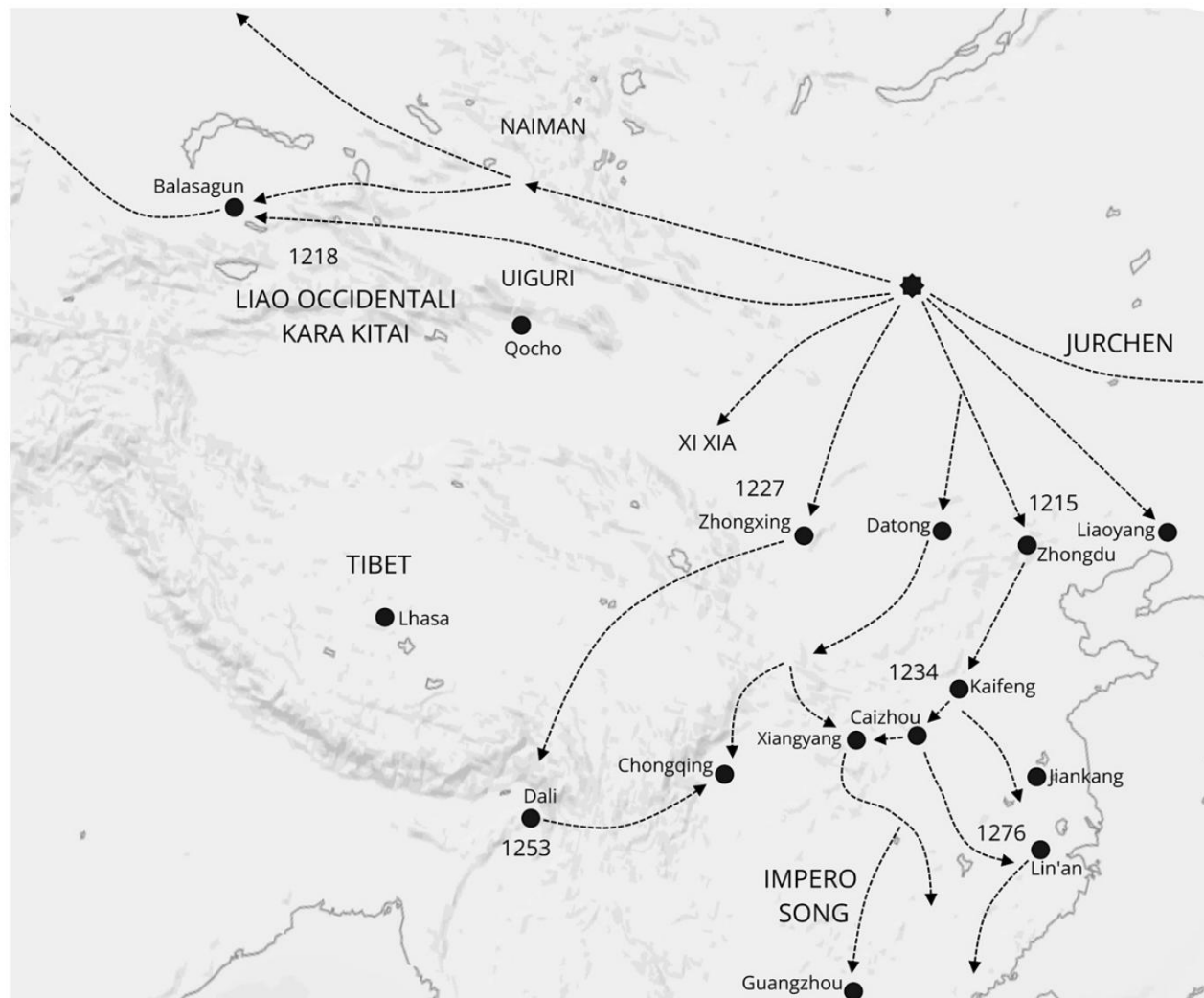
2. The Mongols and Europe

1. *The birth of the Mongol empire*

Around 1167 a child is born on the Mongolian steppes. In one hand he holds a clot of blood, and his eyes shine with intense fire. His name is Temüjin, and his appearance already announces from his first cries a destiny that would transform the world. Thus the *Secret History of the Mongols*, probably composed around the middle of the 13th century, describes the fateful appearance of the one who will be known throughout the world and throughout the centuries as Chinggis (Genghis¹) Khan.

The political situation in Mongolia at the time of the political rise of Temüjin, son of Yesügei, a local aristocrat, was marked by growing rivalries between Mongolian clans and nations, the events of which are little known to us, apart from the chronicle already mentioned, and very little impartial, of the *Secret History*. It says that Temüjin and his family were exposed to hardship and deprivation after the murder of his father by the Tatars, their enemies. Temüjin himself was imprisoned and risked death several times. Only through political acumen and personal courage did he gradually successfully maneuver the intricate tangle of alliances, revenges, and feuds that characterized Mongolian politics. In 1206, after about three decades of uninterrupted wars, Temüjin unified the Mongols into a single nation, and was elected khan (sovereign) with the title of Chinggis² Khan.

The epic aspects of Chinggis Khan's rise to power must not make us lose sight of those structural changes in Mongolian society that can explain the reasons and means of the conquest, through all its phases and over the course of at least three generations. Despite the progression of successes of the Mongols, who from a people of nomadic shepherds became a world power, their political and military expansion was a process that spanned over half a century and went through moments of crisis and setbacks overcome only with difficulty and not without radical leadership changes.



Map 1. The Mongol invasion of China.

The first impetus of the Mongol conquest was directed against neighboring states such as the Chinese Jin dynasty (1115-1236), of Jurchen origin, and the Tangut dynasty of the Western Xia (1038-1227).

Khan to these powerful and populous states was undoubtedly of a contingent, economic nature. To consolidate the process of political centralization carried out by Temüjin and maintain its hegemony, it was necessary to increase tax revenues through the forced extraction of annual payments in the form of tribute from richer neighbors. ⁴ More urgent was the desire to expand territorially.

The unification of the Mongols after decades of division and conflict had created a relatively complex governance structure. The economic weight of an expensive-to-maintain court, a standing army, religious and legal agencies, in the face of an economy too weak and poor to produce fixed revenues, therefore required injections of external resources, which could be obtained

only from the rich agrarian societies of northern China. The Mongols, like other "imperial" nomads before them, used their military force, equipped with a large, disciplined army commanded by veterans, to force neighboring states to make economic contributions and military support that would guarantee stability to the new government. .

The Mongol army was a formidable weapon of pressure against sedentary states that did not have the means to offer particularly effective resistance except behind the protection of the walls of their cities, which however could not defend the surrounding territory and rural space .

To prevent the Mongols from devastating villages and cultivated lands, the payment of a tribute was an acceptable form of compromise, which, although certainly extortionate, allowed the maintenance of a political order and guaranteed peace. The Western Xia, defeated in 1211, were therefore forced to pay annual tribute to the new Mongol state.

⁶ Chinggis Khan then turned against the Jin, devastating and occupying northern China. Emperor Jin, after the sack of the capital Yanjing (today's Beijing), found refuge in the populous and rich city of Kaifeng. ⁷

Until 1215, the behavior of the Mongols did not differ from that of other nomads who in previous eras had created states and military confederations that had plundered the Chinese frontiers, imposed levies, and conquered territories. The Jin dynasty was of Jurchen origin, and therefore Nordic, not Chinese. The Jurchen had conquered northern China after a war with the Kitan, founders of the Liao dynasty, also of "barbarian" origin, and both peoples were more culturally similar to the Mongols themselves than to the Chinese of the Song dynasty, which reigned in south-central China. ⁸ Furthermore, the military commitment directed against Mongol enemies during the wars of unification led Chinggis Khan to expand west of Mongolia, into today's Xinjiang (northwest of today's China) and into eastern Kazakhstan. The Uyghur kingdoms of the East Turkestan oases surrendered peacefully to the ⁹ then under the rule of Kuchlug of the Mongols, Naiman and ancient enemy of Chinggis while the kingdom of the Kara Kitai, Khan, resisted. ¹⁰

The Mongols reached and killed Kuchlug in 1218, eliminating with him the last of the Mongol leaders who had opposed Chinggis Khan. Up to this point the new regime seemed destined to follow in the footsteps of non-Chinese dynasties such as the Jin, the Liao and the Western Xia (Xi Xia).

The event that radically transformed the course of Mongol history and paved the way for the invasion of Western Asia was the unexpected massacre, in 1218, of Mongol emissaries by an official of Khwarezm (or Khwarezm), a

vast and rich empire that roughly included today's southern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Persia and western Afghanistan, ruled by Shah Ala ad-Din Muhammad II, who ascended the throne in 1200.

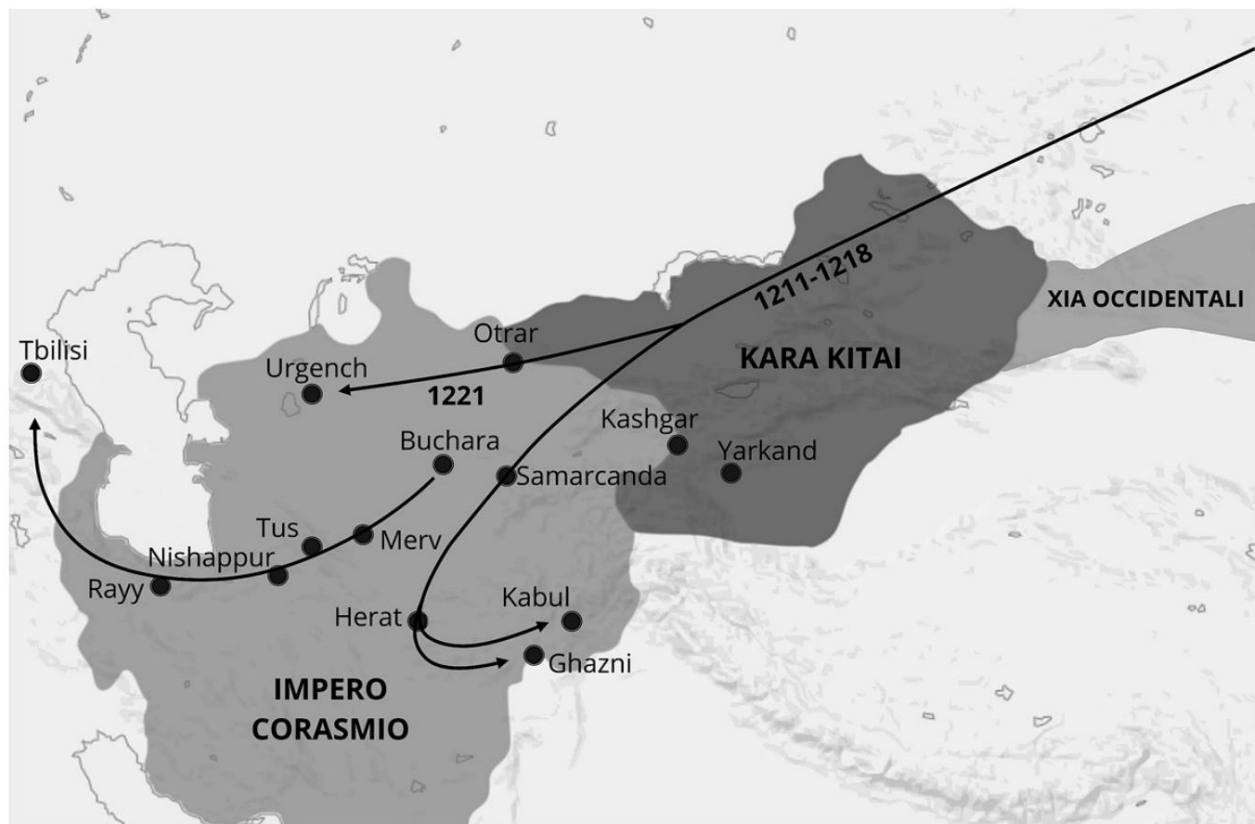
Since the 6th century, relations between China and Central Asia had flourished thanks to international trade on the so-called "Silk Road", a network of connections that included routes traveled not only by merchants, but also by missionaries, political figures and ambassadors, and which it connected the most important cities and markets from China to the Middle East, through Central and Western Asia. International traffic was extremely profitable for those who could establish political control, and therefore a system of taxation, over goods in transit. Already in the 6th and 7th centuries, control over commercial traffic was imposed by the Turkish khans, in particular over the silk trade and diplomatic relations with the Byzantine Empire.

¹¹ During the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907), Central Asian trading companies of Sogdian origin had created an extensive commercial network that exploited bases in China and the support of another nomadic empire: that of the Uighurs (744-840). ¹² After the conquest of the oases of the Tarim basin and the Uyghur cities, through which most goods passed, Chinggis Khan's opening to trade with the Khwarezmian empire therefore seems a natural step in strengthening his hegemony in Asia Oriental. On the other hand, the partnership between the military power of the nomads and the commercial potential of the Central Asian merchants was a decisive factor for the economic consolidation of the nascent Mongol empire.

In 1218 an embassy of 450 Muslim merchants from Mongol territories, a clear sign of already consolidated relations between the Mongols and the Central Asian mercantile community, reached Otrar, a border city of the kingdom of Khwarezm. ¹³ The local governor, however, accused them of espionage and sentenced them to death. Chinggis Khan then sent Mongol emissaries directly to the shah demanding explanations and reparations. He also demanded that the governor of Otrar be punished. Instead of seeking diplomatic conciliation, the shah executed one of the ambassadors and sent the other two back after shaving their beards: an insult almost equal to death. There can be no greater offense in the political culture of the steppes than violating the immunity of ambassadors. In practice it was a declaration of war, and as such it was received by Chinggis Khan.

The invasion of Khwarezmia, which took place in 1219, proved to be an unprecedented success for the Mongols, despite the fact that they ventured into inaccessible territories, unknown to them, and faced fortified cities and a numerically superior army. The forces involved are difficult to estimate even with

approximation as contemporary sources tend to exaggerate the number of combatants. It is very likely that the Mongols, thanks to greater mobility and logistical preparation, were able to field superior forces in each battle, despite the shah's overall troop count being higher. These were divided between the various cities, while the army commanded directly by the shah probably did not exceed 40,000 men. The Mongols, whose forces were estimated at around 100,000, could count on numerical superiority whether they were besieging a city or clashing in an open field. The Mongols were also veterans with iron discipline and movement and coordination capabilities unmatched by any contemporary army, be it Asian or European.



Map 2. The Mongol invasion of Central Asia

Chinggis Khan's stated aim was to avenge the offense suffered by capturing and probably executing the shah. During the campaign, which lasted for four years, the Mongols achieved extraordinary results, effectively asserting their authority in Central Asia and thus bringing themselves to the threshold of the Abbasid caliphate and Russia. First, the khan achieved his goal of punishing the shah who, on the run, died on an island in the Sea.

Caspian in 1220. Secondly, Mongol troops devastated Transoxiana and many of its populous cities. In Samarkand, Bukhara and Urgench, besieged and conquered, the population was decimated. The conquest of Khwarezmia ensured the Mongols' dominance in Central Asia. Although it is unclear whether Chinggis Khan intended to permanently annex it, local officials loyal to the Mongols were placed in charge of cities and provinces.

But even more important was the opening to new horizons of conquest. Launched in pursuit of the fleeing shah, Jebe and Subedei, two of the most experienced Mongol commanders, at the head of around 20,000 soldiers, crossed Khorasan, in north-eastern Iran, and skirting the Caspian Sea entered the Caucasus in 1220. Here they defeated Armenian and Georgian forces before invading Russia. Masses of Cuman nomads fleeing from the Mongols had meanwhile taken refuge in Kiev, joining the Russian army to repel the Mongol invasion. The battle on the Kalka River, in 1223, in which the Russian and Mongol armies faced each other, remains to this day a textbook example of the military tactics of the Mongols who, feigning a retreat, trapped and annihilated the Russian army. Beyond the assertion of Mongol military superiority even against European armies, this expedition provided the Mongol general staff with valuable information on the geography and populations of the Caucasus and Russia, laying the foundations for future invasions.

Chinggis Khan died in August 1227 at the age of about sixty. The world had known the power of the Mongols and seemed vulnerable to further invasions. The Mongolian political framework was complicated by internal dynamics linked to power struggles that were mainly catalyzed on the succession to the throne, a moment in which the aristocracy gathered in a general assembly (*quriltai*) to elevate one of the possible heirs to the dignity of Grand Khan. The transition to the leadership of the empire was politically complex, but it did not cause conflicts between potential successors as one might have feared, in the tradition of contention between heirs to the common throne in the political culture of the steppe. Jochi's prestige and primogeniture seemed likely to prevail, but he died a few months before his father (February 1227) and in the end it was the third son Ögödei who was elected by consensus. He ascended the throne officially in 1229 and, after a period of stasis, the new generation of Chinggis Khan's children and grandchildren began to plan new invasions.

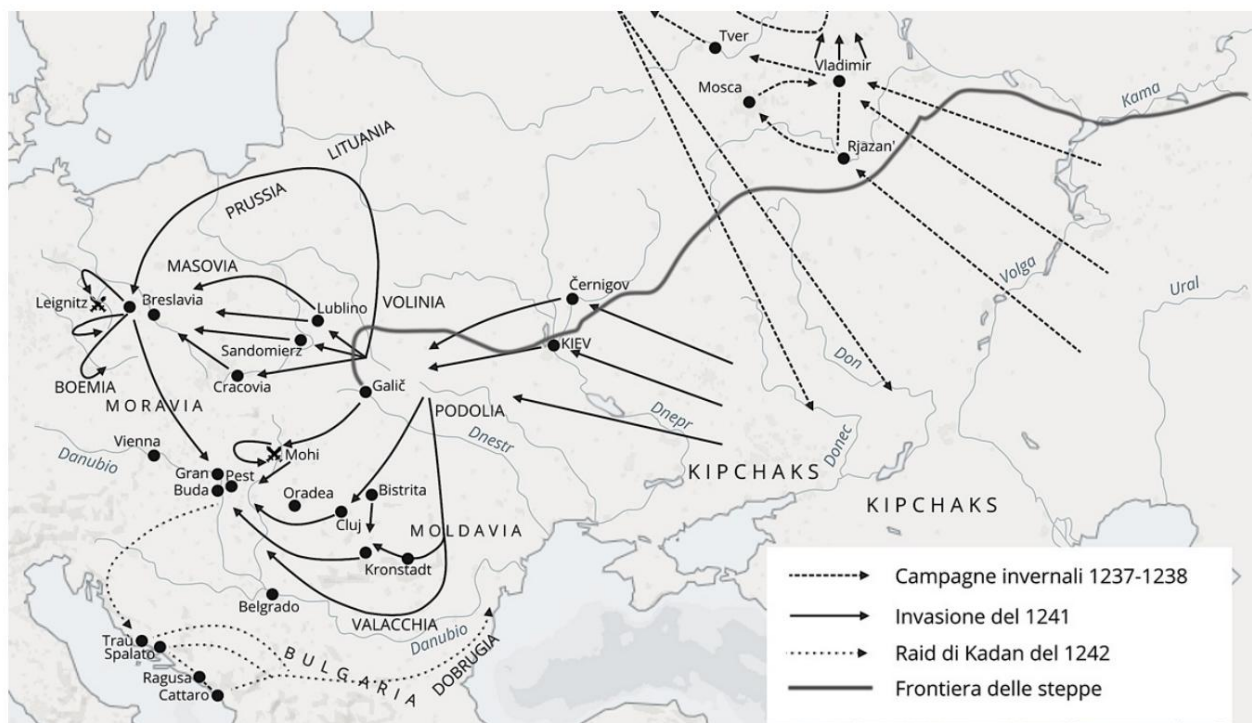
2. The assault on Europe

It is likely that Chinggis Khan himself had divided the empire into

four geographical areas, each of which was then assigned to one of his sons, eastern China to Ögödei, the third son, west to the descendants of Jochi (the firstborn, whose paternity, however, was uncertain), central Asia to Chagadai, second son, and Mongolia itself to Tolui, youngest son and guardian, according to Mongolian tradition, of the original family heritage. Although this division was only theoretical, and the capital Karakorum in the center of Mongolia assigned to Tolui remained the imperial seat and residence of Ögödei, there is no doubt that the West was the prerogative of the Jochi lineage.

In the general meeting of the Mongol general staff in 1235, future military campaigns were planned, including the invasion of Eastern Europe, the prerogative of Batu, as the eldest son of Jochi, and the completion of the conquest of northern China.

[17](#)



Map 3. The Mongol invasion of Europe

In 1236, after having subdued the Jin dynasty, Ögödei and his council decreed the beginning of a new campaign in the west, entrusted to Batu. The campaign began in 1236-37, and was directed primarily against the Volga and Ural area, inhabited by Turkic populations such as Bashkirs, Bulgarians, and the Cumans themselves who had previously been defeated. This first impact pushed the Cumans westward, across the band of grasslands that extends to the Hungarian *puszta*, where King Béla IV (1235-1270) granted

asylum to the Cuman chief Koten and a population of approximately 40,000 individuals. ¹⁸

The Mongol assault was directed primarily against the Russian principalities, divided by internal political rivalries and disconnected from Catholic Europe due to the Orthodox schism. Abandoned to the mercy of the invaders, the Rus was unable to offer resistance. The first cities to fall were those in the most geographically exposed territories: Ryazan' and Vladimir-Suzdal'.

¹⁹ Then Batu marched against Kiev. Here the Mongols' peremptory demands for submission were repeatedly rejected by the local authorities, who, for good measure, executed the Mongol ambassadors. As we have already seen, such actions were considered unforgivable by the Mongols, although it seems that they did not intend to devastate the urban and socioeconomic system of the Russian principalities, but rather to obtain their surrender and install control structures with the aim of extracting tribute and remittances. tax. ²⁰ The courageous Russian resistance forced the situation towards what we can define as the macabre alternative of the Mongolian ultimatum: a conquest marked by such violence as to discourage any future resistance.

The siege of Kiev lasted from 28 November to 6 December 1240 and, once it fell, the city was put to fire and sword, most of the population massacred, and the buildings razed to the ground.

Of the Russian cities conquered between 1238 and 1240, none were able to offer resistance for more than a few days, and the Russian armies hastily assembled to counter the Mongol advance were regularly defeated with very heavy losses. The reason for the Mongol success is attributed to a number of tactical and strategic advantages. It should also be noted that the armies of medieval Europe were made up of a small minority of professional soldiers, an expression of the chivalric aristocracy, accompanied by a multitude of poorly armed people without experience or training in arms. The Mongols, in contrast, were experts in warfare, with proven capabilities both in terms of personal skills in riding, fighting, and archery, and in collective action tactics. The Mongolian strategy was based on detailed knowledge of the territory and precise coordination between the various departments. Furthermore, on the battlefield, they were favored by superior weapons, such as the composite or reflex bow, with a range and penetration capacity superior to the protection offered by medieval shields and armour, which in any case only the nobility could afford. The charge of the Mongolian heavy cavalry was also a formidable weapon in the open field for breaking the ranks of inexperienced infantry without adequate defensive weapons. Furthermore, the Mongols used a vast repertoire of stratagems to lure the enemy into traps and ambushes. For fighting ability, mobility, competence of commanders and discipline the Mongol army operated at

a level far superior to any European military team of the time.

[21](#)

Once the Russian nobility had been brought to its knees and their cities devastated, the Mongols launched a coordinated attack against Poland and Hungary in the spring of 1241, facing their armies in two decisive battles, at Legnica in Poland and at Mohi in Hungary. on 9 and 11 April 1241 respectively.

The Mongol army marched through Moldavia and Wallachia, and then, divided into three columns, crossed the Carpathians. The Hungarian prairie, rich in fodder, provided a seemingly ideal environment for the sustenance of a population of nomads. The Mongols raided and conquered the Hungarian cities, sowing terror among the population as already experienced in Russia. The alleged *casus belli* was the protection extended by King Béla IV to the Cumans, considered by the Mongols as their enemies, who however in the meantime had come into conflict with the local population after the assassination of their leader Koten at the hands of the Hungarians, caused by strong ethnic tensions and policies. In the meantime, the king had fled after Mohi's defeat, while the nobles attempted a courageous but futile resistance. In the winter of 1241 the Mongols crossed the Danube on horseback, taking advantage of an intense cold that had frozen the waters. Having entered western Hungary, they conquered Esztergom, the capital and political centre. At the same time, a part of the army under the command of Kadan launched itself in pursuit of the king, who after seeking help in Austria had taken refuge in Dalmatia in the fortress of Split.

[22](#)

The second phase of the Hungarian invasion was much less comfortable for the Mongols. Several cities and fortresses managed to resist their siege and finally, between April and May 1242, the Mongols returned to the Volga plains, proceeding south of the Carpathians through Serbia and Bulgaria. The reasons for their withdrawal have long been debated.

[23](#) One of the first theories advanced on the basis of the report of Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, the Franciscan friar sent by Innocent IV to the Great Khan in 1245, was that Batu had decided to return to Russia due to the new political framework that opened with the death of khan Ögödei, and required the major exponents of the imperial clan to participate in the assemblies and the political process that would determine the succession. However, Batu never went to Karakorum, the capital of the empire, but remained in Saraj, located in the lower Volga, the main Mongolian political center in the West, destined to become the capital of the Jochi ulus (the so-called "Golden Horde"). One of the most recent theories would attribute the reasons for the withdrawal to the logistical difficulties of the military campaign. The difficulties of the conquest of western Hungary between the winter and spring of 1242 would have been

caused at least in part by the thaw of masses of ice and snow that had accumulated during a particularly harsh and rainy winter. The Hungarian plain, thus transformed into a swamp, made the Mongols' movements and military operations much more difficult, and exposed them to possible reprisals from European armies, forcing them to give up an occupation of [24](#) It is also probable that the raids and violence against the long term. reducing local population had damaged agricultural production to the point of dramatically resources. One objective that the Mongols were unable to achieve was the capture and punishment of the Hungarian king, who was thus able to return to his homeland unscathed.

Whatever the cause of the retreat, it is certain that Batu and his generals had extended their lines of communication far beyond what was sustainable even for an army as mobile as the Mongol one. The strategic needs to support the occupation and control the territory in a phase characterized by growing tensions between the exponents of the imperial clan probably advised Batu to concentrate his forces in Russia, where he could best consolidate his power.

Europe was spared by the unexpected retreat of the Mongols, but the European armies and the whole of Christianity found themselves vulnerable and completely helpless in the face of an assault from which there seemed to be no salvation. Once the danger of a broader and more lasting invasion had escaped, feelings of great anxiety, but also of reflection, spread throughout Europe. [25](#) Beyond the explanations that harked back to prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, the European reaction consisted primarily of a series of exploratory and diplomatic missions sent to the Mongols to understand their origins, intentions, and strength. [26](#) It was this rational and systematic opening to the knowledge of a very fearsome enemy that marked the transition from a passive and unprepared Europe to an active and aware one.

Although the expansion was almost unopposed, the political situation at the top of the Mongol power deteriorated further, degenerating into hostile alignments between the various lineages, and in particular between the descendants of Ögödei and Chagadai on the one hand and the sons of Tolui and Jochi on the other . A prominent political role was also played by the extremely influential wives and mothers of the khans, who promoted alliances and maneuvers aimed at the advancement of their husbands and sons. The hostility between Batu and Güyük, Ögödei's son and successor from 1246, matured during the campaign in Russia, and risked dragging the empire into civil war even before Güyük was designated as khan. However, just two years after his election, Güyük died, and it was Batu, once he took control of the succession, who favored the rise of Möngke, Tolui's eldest son.

It took three years of negotiations and bloody internal feuding before a new order emerged. In 1251 Möngke was designated as the new khan, opening a new phase in the history of Mongol expansion, characterized by a renewed military commitment, but also by deep divisions, some pre-existing and others generated precisely by the expansion of conquests. Following these conflicts, the 1360s sanctioned the de facto separation of the empire into four virtually independent khanates although under the formal authority of a single sovereign.

With Möngke's reign, the Mongols not only continued to expand their territorial conquests but learned to govern those regions they had invaded and subjugated. This was a fairly rapid process of transformation that involved the army, administration, and economy.

Means and purposes therefore changed. The Mongol army was enriched with technologies, such as siege engines imported from conquered states, which facilitated the capture of cities, castles, and other fortified places. In the conquered areas, the Mongol rulers recruited local councilors and administrators, who introduced principles of taxation and regularization of tax revenue. Furthermore, after the destructive force of the first assault, they aimed to conserve economic resources and facilitate trade between the various regions of the empire. This change in perspective and strategy led the Mongols to establish relationships with European states, and to insert themselves as a new piece (a piece of notable proportions) in the political and diplomatic logics of the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and the Islamic Middle East. Meanwhile, Christian Europe had made great efforts to access concrete knowledge through missions and diplomatic meetings. It cannot be said that these efforts produced satisfactory results from a strictly political point of view, but they facilitated communication between two entities completely foreign to each other, and paved the way for other and more profitable agreements, which allowed European merchants to reaping fruits that would have been unimaginable just a few years earlier.

3. First relations between Europe and the Mongols

The first news about the Mongols arrived in Europe as early as 1237 thanks to a Hungarian Dominican friar, a certain Julian, who had gone to the Volga territory in search of the original Magyar populations.

²⁸ Here he had met people who spoke the same language as him and had informed him of the Mongol devastations in Russia. Julian also met some Mongol nobles who gave him a document from Batu essentially requesting the

submission of Hungary. Hurrying back to his homeland, he handed the document to King Béla IV, who could, if he had taken this threat seriously, prepare his defenses. Unfortunately for Hungary, this was not the case, and they preferred to ignore Batu's letter. ²⁹

The devastating experience of the Hungarian invasion did not allow us to ignore the possibility of new attacks on Europe. Pope Innocent IV, elected to the papacy in 1243, included in the list of topics to be discussed at the First Council of Lyon (1245) the search for a "remedy against the Tartars" (*remedium contra Tartaros*). But even before the Council he wrote two letters, in March 1245, to send to the Mongols. In the first the pontiff illustrated the foundations of Christian doctrine, and in the second he warned the Mongols against undertaking new attacks on Christianity, under penalty of divine punishment. ³⁰ These letters were then entrusted to missionaries who had the task of acting as envoys of the pope. The decision to send the missions to Mongolia also had a cognitive purpose about a people who, not surprisingly, seemed to have emerged from an infernal place, the *Tartarus* of Greek mythology, which their name recalled. If myths, legends and prophecies multiplied in a Europe still far from the rationalism of the modern age, the papacy's decision to obtain reliable eyewitness testimony on the nature, government, society and above all intentions of the Mongols was also dictated by the desire to Don't repeat past mistakes. The mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans, recently established, found themselves at the forefront of the missions in Mongolian soil.

The papal letters were entrusted to two Dominicans, Ascelino da Cremona and André of Longjumeau and to a Franciscan, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine. The Dominicans, in two separate missions, made contact with the Mongols in Armenia and Persia, but did not go beyond Tabriz. It is interesting to note that Ascelinus of Cremona, having arrived in front of Baiju, commander of the Mongol troops in Asia Minor, risked being summarily executed for not wanting to submit to the Mongol protocol and prostrate himself. Perhaps the most interesting result of these missions, however limited and inconclusive, was the very fact of establishing relations with the Mongol —

leaders in the West. ³¹ Far more important was the mission of the Franciscan Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who reached the Mongol court in Karakorum in August 1246. Here he witnessed the coronation of Güyük, the new khan of the empire, and received a letter from him for the Pope essentially demanding his submission to the Mongols. Mongolian diplomacy did not shine with creativity, since every interaction with European monarchs was based on bases that did not allow negotiation: submission or invasion. But beyond

of the diplomatic failure or the failed attempt to convert Güyük, the report that John presented to the Pope (then resident in Lyon) was very important for the detailed and timely information on habits, customs, laws, military strength, and government of the Mongols. For the first time, Europeans had news not of devastation and violence, but of Mongolian society and politics and their culture, moreover from a reliable and direct testimony. [32](#)

Diplomatic relations with the Mongols were not a monopoly of the papacy. In 1247 the Mongol prince Eljigidei, Güyük's envoy to the West, who seemed to have an interest in an alliance with the Christians against the caliphate, opened negotiations with Louis IX, king of France. Following these diplomatic overtures, in 1248 Louis IX sent André of Longjumeau to Mongolia to present the khan himself with the proposal of a Mongol-Christian alliance against the Mamluks. Having reached Karakorum immediately after the death of khan Güyük (1248), the Dominican was unable to obtain anything other than a new request for unconditional submission from the regent Oghul Qaimish, Güyük's wife, far from hopes of alliance and collaboration. [33](#) Among the reasons for the failed agreements there were probably the serious tensions, which resulted in open conflict, which marked the end of the house of Ögödei and the triumph of that of Tolui. Such intersections between foreign and domestic politics were indecipherable outside the Mongolian context, and it is perhaps for this reason, more than any other, that attempts to forge an anti-Islamic alliance between Christian Europe and Mongolian Asia failed. In part. This does not mean that the frequent embassies, meetings and contacts left their mark, and constituted a first concrete step towards the knowledge, in Europe, of a phenomenon that gradually became less terrifying, and almost seductive for the prospects it presented.

From a political point of view, the mission that obtained the most tangible results was that of another Franciscan missionary, the Flemish William of Rubruck, also sent by Louis IX to Mongolia. The journey, between 1253 and 1255, brought William to Karakorum in the presence of the new emperor Möngke, represents one of the most accurate testimonies and constitutes, together with Pian del Carpine's report, a source of inestimable value on Mongolian society. The stated objective of the mission was Catholic evangelization, intended to counter the spread of Nestorian Christianity among Asian populations, and to bring comfort to German prisoners who had been deported to Mongolian territories. William did not reach these Christian communities, nor was he successful in converting the khan or other Mongols to Christianity. But the importance of the mission lies in the relationship full of ethnographic, geographical, and religious information collected in order to succeed

understand the strategy of the Mongols and the characteristics of their society. 34

The search for an understanding inspired diplomatic exchanges and missions until 1262, when Hülegü, brother of Khan Möngke, supreme commander of the Mongol forces in southwestern Asia and founder of the Ilkhanate (the Mongol empire in Persia), sent a letter to Louis IX with a further proposal for collaboration against Mamluk Egypt.

35 Reconstructing the exact path of these diplomatic activities is a difficult task, because the traces are partial and much information has been lost. Some Christian kings, who had become supporters and allies of the Mongols, such as the Armenian king Hethum, poured energy into trying to create an alliance between Franks and Mongols, Christians and pagans united by a common anti-Islamic interest. This alliance, however, was never realized, and if one can only speculate on the reasons - communication difficulties, internal conflicts in both camps, mutual lack of trust, and a constantly shifting international framework - one can also say for certain that by the early 1360s the perception of the Mongols in Europe had definitely changed. The sense of impotence and dismay with which they had been welcomed had almost dissolved following information brought by ambassadors and missionaries and political calculations dictated by pressing urgencies, first of all the persistent rivalry between Christian kingdoms and the Islamic world. In the eyes of the Europeans, the Mongols were still a foreign element but no longer completely alien. In the meantime, within the Mongol empire, new conflicts had developed that had undermined its unity, accelerating fragmentation and centrifugal tendencies that led to the creation of four separate kingdoms: the Ilkhanate in Iran, the Golden Horde (or Jochi Khanate) in Russia, the Chagadai kingdom in Central Asia, and the Yuan dynasty in China and Mongolia.

4. From 1251 to 1266: expansion, divisions and new order of the empire Mongolian

During the *quriltai* held in Karakorum in 1251, two decisions were made that were destined to have a profound impact on the history of the Mongol Empire. The first was the election of Möngke and the second was the continuation of conquests both in the east, in China, and in the west, in the Islamic regions of Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Mongolian politics was dominated by "parties" that roughly coincided with the lineage of Chinggis Khan's four principal sons. The party of Tolui (or Toluidi) represented by Möngke himself and his brother Qubilai, and the party of Jochi (or Jochidi) represented by the powerful western khan, Batu, had found themselves united in the clash against the ruling house of

Ögödei, and his son Güyük. Möngke was elected with the support of Batu, with whom he had good relations and had already collaborated during previous Western military campaigns. Batu, despite the prestige he held, was penalized politically by the physical distance between his capital Saraj, in the lower Volga, and Karakorum, in Mongolia, a region which was in theory the prerogative of Tolui. Batu remained the de facto Western ruler, although formally subordinate to Möngke. The separation between an eastern wing and a western wing had precedents in other nomadic empires that had their roots in Mongolia, such as the medieval Turkic Empire (Gök Türk) of the 6th century, and therefore not unrelated to the political traditions of the steppes. In the case of Batu and Möngke, the boundary between the western and eastern areas was established roughly east of the Aral Sea, between the Talas and Chu rivers.

During the *quriltai* of summer 1251 it was also confirmed that Iran, the Caucasus and Anatolia belonged to Batu's area of influence (and therefore expansion), forming part of the western wing of the empire. However, disagreements arose over the continuation of the campaigns and in particular over the conquest of the caliphate. Here two different positions were compared, on the one hand the khan's prerogative to determine the imperial strategy, and on the other the right claimed by Batu to conquer the western regions. Furthermore, the Mongol commander in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Anatolia, Baiju Noyan, was a member of Ögödei's lineage who had passed into Batu's service, avoiding the sad fate that befell many other nobles loyal to Güyük. Batu had established peaceful relations with the caliphate and the continuation of the conquest would not only destabilize the existing political balance, but also deprive Batu and the Jochids of any desire to control an economically rich and strategically important region.

The disagreements between Batu and Möngke led to a stalemate that lasted for some years, but already in 1254, the year before Batu's death, preparations began for the expedition which, under the command of Hülegü, would lead to the conquest of caliphate and the founding of the Ilkhanate, as the kingdom was called [36](#) It has been speculated that upon the death of in the internal political transition Batu Möngke Mongol in the Middle East. intended to intervene of the Golden Horde,

supporting the candidacy of Sartaq, son of Batu and close to Möngke himself. [37](#)

Indeed, Sartaq succeeded Batu but his reign was short-lived (r. 1256-57), as he died on his return journey from the capital of the empire, where he had been formally appointed khan of the ulus of Jochi. After the brief regency of Boraqchin, widow of Batu and mother of Sartaq, Berke, brother of Batu, imposed himself.

Berke Khan's (r. 1257-1267) accession to the throne of the Golden Horde marked

a turning point in the history of the Jochi khanate and in the complicated network of international relations that also involved Venice, Genoa, the Mamluk sultanate and Byzantium.

While the succession to Batu was taking place in the Golden Horde, in 1256 the expedition that would lead Hülegü to conquer Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq and Syria set off from Karakorum. Mongol forces were estimated at between 100,000 and 150,000 soldiers, accompanied by over half a million horses. ³⁸ The expedition was preceded by two years of preparations to — prepare supplies and plot a route that would ensure the logistical support necessary for such a vast army. The Mongols had to exploit local resources, and this required accurate knowledge of the territory, which guaranteed sufficient pastures for the horses and protected animals and soldiers against the danger of intense cold, drought or other natural obstacles. The army moved slowly, crossing the steppes of Mongolia and Kazakhstan and then moving southeast, crossing today's Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and continuing up the high mountains of Khorasan into northern Iran. Arriving on the Caspian Sea, Hülegü launched a difficult winter campaign against the Nizari Ismaili state, a Scythian sect founded at the end of the 11th century, also called the Assassins.

³⁹ The Nizari Ismaili had gained strong political influence in Iran, Syria and Asia Minor, terrorizing both Christian and Muslim heads of state and clerics. Hülegü had asked for the unconditional surrender of their leader, Imam Rukn al-Dyn, who had however misunderstood and tried not to grant the surrender, probably counting on the safety of his fortresses, perched on top of mountain peaks. The Mongol army, however, led by commander Kitbuqa, one of the most skilled Mongol generals, Hülegü's right-hand man, and leading protagonist of the campaign, managed to take Alamut, the main fortress, and bring down the powerful sect. If the caliphate breathed a sigh of relief at the destruction of the Scythian sect, mortal enemy of Sunni Islam, it was an illusion that did not last long. Hülegü took his forces to winter in the plains of northern Iran and Azerbaijan, the Mughan steppe offering sufficient pasture for his troops, but in the meantime he planned the campaign to take Baghdad, which would destroy the Abbasid Caliphate and overturn the Islamic world. The Mongol army moved along several lines in the autumn of 1257, reaching Baghdad on 29 January 1258. The city fell on 10 February, after a brief siege. Hülegü proved ruthless, and Arab chronicles inform us of the total destruction and massacres inflicted on the local population. Caliph Al-Musta'sim (r. 1242-1258) himself was executed.

Having taken Baghdad, Hülegü effectively completed the conquest of the major centers of

political and religious power of Islam, already started from the time of Chinggis Khan with the invasion of Khwarezmia and continued during the khanate of Ögödei with the campaigns against the Seljuk sultanate of Rum, in Anatolia. Iran and Anatolia were under the supreme command of Baiju, who, as we have already seen, had been loyal to Batu and ruled the province with a system of indirect government exercised through the control of local potentates. Hülegü's arrival had radically changed the political geography of the conquest. Baiju had received orders to join his troops with the main army in the attack on Baghdad, and even before that he had had to abandon his base in Azerbaijan to make way for Hülegü's troops, moving to eastern Anatolia. The future ilkhan had also repeatedly expressed his impatience towards Baiju, accused of stalling and perhaps considered suspicious due to his past in the service of Güyük and Batu. Subordinated to Kitbuqa during the campaign, two years after the conquest of Baghdad Baiju disappeared, in 1260, during the Mongol operations in Syria, probably executed on the orders of Hülegü.

In 1259 operations began to further extend Mongol rule in the Middle East. The Mongol armies, reinforced by Christian contingents allied with Georgians, Armenians, and Franks, entered Syria in January 1260, quickly conquering Aleppo and Damascus, and establishing a government there that was also based on the collaboration of local emirs. Hülegü withdrew most of his forces, probably in April or May, retreating towards Azerbaijan and Tabriz. In Syria there remained a contingent limited to around 10,000 soldiers or slightly more, under the command of Kitbuqa.

⁴¹ Orders of submission had meanwhile been forwarded to the Mamluk sultan Qutuz (r. 1259-1260), who had recently taken power in Egypt, and whose legitimacy was still in question.

The Mongols, who had defeated every Islamic army up to that point, and controlled Syria, had no reason to worry about Qutuz, who had only ascended the throne in November 1259 thanks to the support of usually unreliable emirs and local rulers. The political fragmentation of the Islamic world after the fall of the caliphate favored the Mongols, and gave them a sense of security that facts would soon prove to be illusory. Kitbuqa was quick to consolidate his conquest of Syria, and also had contact with the Franks who controlled some important cities and fortresses in the region. Although relations were cautiously peaceful, the Mongols made their authority felt by sacking Sidon in August 1260.

⁴² A situation loomed in which Kitbuqa would effectively replace Baiju as Mongol ruler of the Levant, but using a much heavier hand, in the style favored by Hülegü.

These plans would soon fade due to Qutuz's success in rallying local emirs and officials under the Mamluk banner to repel the Mongol threat. Baybars (r. 1260-1277), the skilled and experienced commander who had previously led the Islamic troops against the crusaders of Louis IX, also joined the enterprise. The Mamluk army, which included approximately 12,000 well-armed soldiers, headed towards Syria, intending to defeat and drive out the Mongols. Kitbuqa, as soon as he heard of the imminent arrival of the Mamluks, gathered his forces and marched against them. The two armies clashed at Ayn Jalut, in Palestine, and in the clash Qutuz prevailed, while Kitbuqa fell fighting valiantly. ⁴³ On the back of this victory, Qutuz broke into Syria, wiping out what remained of the Mongols and thus annexing Syria to the territory of the Mamluk sultanate. Shortly thereafter Qutuz himself was assassinated, favoring the accession to the throne of Baybars, who effectively re-established the caliphate in Cairo. The Golden Horde khan Berke (r. 1257-1266) recognized his authority as the head of Islam, and placed him under his formal protection. ⁴⁴ An alliance was thus created between Berke and Baybars opposed to their common enemy, the Ilkhanate founded by Hülegü.

⁴⁵

Hülegü swore to avenge the offense, and for the next sixty years the history of the Mamluk Sultanate and the Ilkhanate was marked by continuous clashes and wars in which neither side managed to gain the upper hand, but which transformed Middle Eastern politics and they determined alliances and conflicts throughout the region. The immediate consequences of the defeat suffered by Hülegü were felt above all within the Mongol empire, and were grafted onto a very complex situation that emerged following Möngke's death in 1259.

In the aftermath of this event two main ruptures occurred, the one between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde, which resulted in the civil war between Hülegü and Berke, and the internal one between the Toluids in Mongolia, which resulted in another civil war between Arigh Böke and his brother Qubilai. ⁴⁶

The situation stabilized only towards the mid-1260s, but not completely, as the hostilities between the different centers of power continued in the following years, such as the conflict between Qubilai and Qaidu, Ögödei's nephew and powerful Central Asian khan .

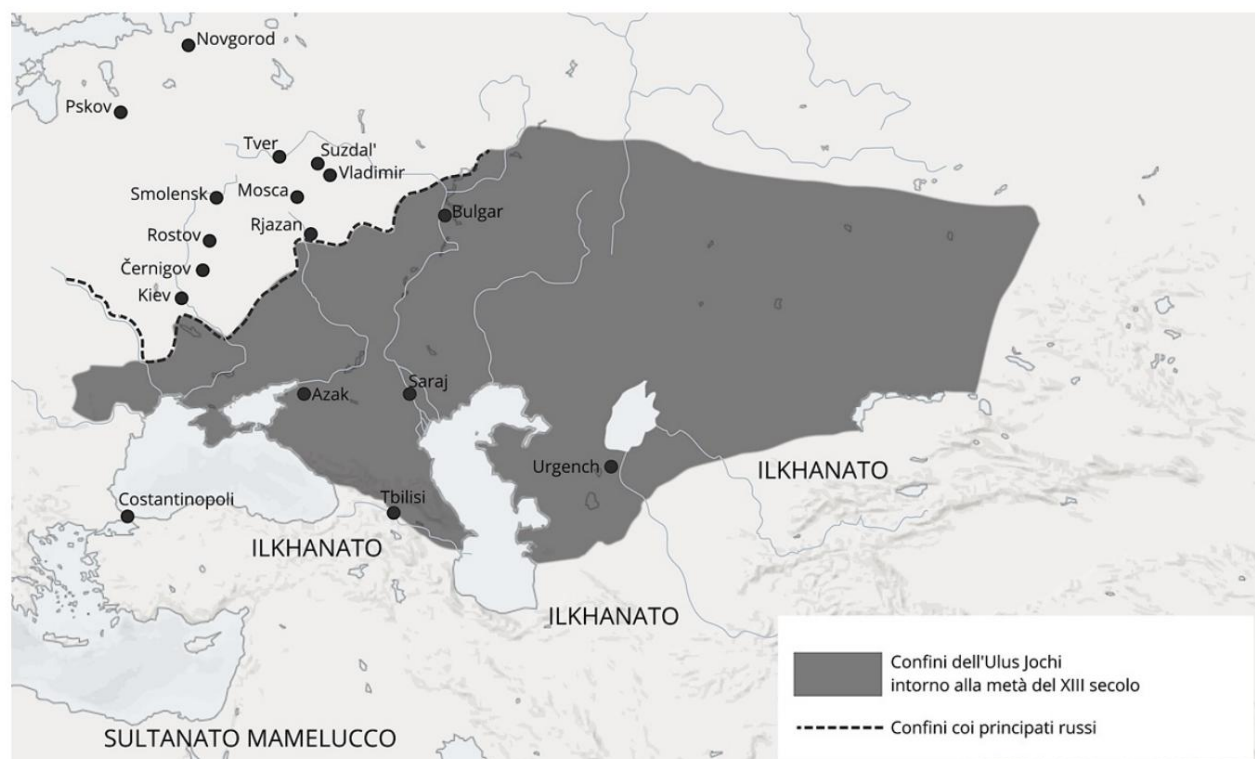
⁴⁷

After Möngke's death in 1259, his brother Qubilai, supported by Hülegü, prevailed and was elected supreme khan of the Mongol Empire. The succession, however, was contested by Arigh Böke, also son of Tolui and younger brother of Qubilai, who had initially obtained most of the consensus. In this fratricidal struggle Berke, head of the still powerful Jochid party, whose hostility against Hülegü continued to grow, took the side of Arigh Böke, who was also supported by the Chagadai ulus in Central Asia. ⁴⁸ Qubilai,

having returned to Mongolia from northern China, where he had his political and military base, he managed to bring the Mongolian aristocracy to his side, fending off Arigh Böke's challenge. The political defeat of the latter and his faction resulted in the civil war from which Qubilai emerged victorious thanks to superior resources and strategy. This war marked on the one hand the strengthening of the Qubilai-Hülegü political axis, an alliance that was also maintained later, when Qubilai conquered China and founded the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). On the other hand, it cemented the rivalry between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate.

These conflicts were aggravated by disagreements of a religious nature. Berke was the first of the Mongolian khans to convert to a foreign religion, Islam. The violence unleashed by Hülegü in the heart of the Abbasid caliphate reverberated throughout the Islamic world, causing horrified condemnation from all believers. Hülegü had not only sacked Baghdad and abolished the caliphate, but had also executed the caliph, the political and spiritual leader. Furthermore, the loss of Anatolia and Iran from the Yochid political orbit was certainly not welcomed, and finally Hülegü had initiated a large-scale purge of local elites [loyal](#) to Berke in the main cities of the Levant and Caucasia. November 1262, around two hundred Mongols loyal to Berke left the Ilkhanate and refuge under Mamluk protection, citing the conflict between Berke and Hülegü as the [took](#) reason for their request for asylum.

[50](#)



Map 4. The Ulus Jochi around the mid-13th century

The war began in the winter of 1261-1262, when the Jochid army, led by the general and noyon Nogaï, leader of the right wing of the Golden Horde, attacked the Ilkhanate on the border of the Terek River in the southern Caucasus, pushing up to Derbent and Shirvan.⁵¹ Hülegü's counteroffensive, sudden and effective, was successful in repelling Nogaï and liberating Shirvan in November 1262. Furthermore, the Ilkhanid army, led by Abaqa, son and future successor of Hülegü, advanced beyond the Terek and penetrated the northern Caucasus until reaching the winter camp of Berke in December 1262. He had already abandoned him, and in January 1263 he mounted a counteroffensive in his turn, defeating Abaqa and pushing him back south of the Caucasus, but once he arrived in Derbent he retreated. The conflict had damaged both sides, leaving them unable to continue hostilities, and its conclusion established the new political map of the region, which was ratified by Qubilai in 1263.

To complete the picture it is necessary to mention another conflict between Qubilai and the Central Asian khanate of Chagadai, which included not only today's Uzbekistan, but also a large part of northwestern China, from today's Xinjiang to the province of Ningxia, and therefore controlled a good part of the oasis cities that were obligatory stops for international trade. The de facto ruler of the Chagadai khanate, Qaidu, remained a thorn in Qubilai's side, and a source of tension in Mongol politics in the 1260s and 1270s. In 1264 Qubilai began construction of the empire's new capital, Dadu in Chinese ("big capital"), also known as Khanbaliq, and located near the old capital of the Jin empire, today's Beijing. From here he continued to campaign against China's Southern Song dynasty. At the end of a long resistance, the Song were defeated by a now multi-ethnic Mongol army, equipped with technologies, such as siege engines and warships, acquired from the subjugated populations. The dynasty was proclaimed in 1271 with the name Yuan, "origin", which ideally celebrated the opening of a new era dominated by the Mongols as a universal power. Military operations continued until 1279, when the last resistance of Song loyalists was broken and China, for the first time in history, was entirely subjected to a foreign people.

5. *The trade policies inaugurated by the Mongols*

From approximately 1237 to 1260 the main caravan routes of Persia, of

Transcaucasia and Anatolia had come under the formal control of the Jochi ulus. In the middle of the century a territorial continuity had therefore been created between the Latin empire of Constantinople, the empire of Nicaea, that of Trebizond - tributary of the Mongols - and the Mongols themselves. The king of Lesser Armenia – a state which had its most profitable and strategic mercantile center in the port of Laiazzo – was himself a vassal of the Mongols. Goods leaving the region's major caravan cities and ports for the coastal and inland markets of the Golden Horde were exempt from taxes and duties. ⁵³ However, Batu's formal control was counterbalanced by a more complex and detailed factual situation.

During the military campaigns, Hülegü remained de facto governor of those ⁵⁴ Hülegü's power issued therefore depended on the approval of the Jochids and regions. by *the yarlighs* (edicts) from Saraj.

By 1260 Hülegü had assumed control of the main arteries crossing Iran and Asia Minor from Nishappur to Damghan to Rayy. From here you could go down towards Hamadan and Baghdad or go up towards Tabriz, the southern Caucasus and the great emporiums of Dvin and Ani and then proceed towards Sivas, a fundamental hub and connection center between Laiazzo to the south and Trabzon to the north. The merchants could then continue to Konya, capital of the Sultanate of Rum and continue on to Constantinople and Nicaea. This network of roads, support points, cities and markets allowed the integration of a vast traffic, in which merchants of all origins participated and which brought huge revenues to those who controlled access and transit.

⁵⁵



Map 5. The Ilkhanate in the second half of the 13th century

The Mamluks, for their part, controlled all the most important trading posts, ports of call and footholds from North Africa to Syria, traditionally used by Western merchants and the reason for the harshest conflicts between the Italian maritime republics: Damascus, Aleppo, Tyre, Antioch and Beirut ([map 3](#), chapter 2). To have an international scope, the two systems had to be interconnected. However, hostilities between Berke and Hülegü had severed connections between Saraj and Cairo, preventing merchants operating in the [Golden Horde](#) from exporting their products to Egypt. Among these, the goods most requested by the Mamluks, and the most profitable, were slaves, especially young males to be trained in military life. The steppes between the northern coast of the Black Sea and the lower reaches of the Dnieper were the main basin of the slave trade. [56](#) In order for this trade to continue, Berke needed to create a direct connection with the Bosphorus and therefore with the Byzantine empire that Michael VIII had recently reconstituted. on the relative convenience of the Alexandria-Constantinople-Crimea-Saraj route, which involved a round trip of around four months, including stops. For his part, Michael VIII needed strong allies and secure borders, given the external threats and the precarious conditions in which both the army and the treasury found themselves [58](#).

[57](#) The search for an agreement with Byzantium was based

[—](#) In other words, the alliance between the Golden Horde and the Mamluks, which derived both from their common hostility to the Ilkhanate and from commercial needs, was favored by the involvement of the reconstituted Byzantine Empire, which offered a logical and practicable alternative to communication and trade between the two allies. [59](#)

[—](#) This new political and commercial order is particularly relevant in relation to Genoese and Venetian activities as it explains the diversified aspect of the presence of Italian merchants in Mongolian lands. As long as it was possible, they maintained a presence both in the Ilkhanid empire, in the capital Tabriz, passing through Trebizond, and in the territory of the Golden Horde, especially in Crimea. This split was made necessary by the blocking of any direct contact between the two Mongolian states. What enormously favored exchanges were the innovations brought by the Mongols, who, beyond political divisions, had nevertheless created a homogeneous commercial space on an unprecedented scale. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, it was precisely because of the massacre perpetrated by the governor of Khwarezm against a caravan of merchants under Mongol protection that triggered the conquest of Central Asia.

In implementing new policies of commercial expansion the Mongols did not differ from other nomadic steppe empires, but given the extent of their empire, and the higher level of production and marketing achieved by both the European and Chinese economies in the 13th century, unprecedented potential opened up. The Mongol conquest, combined with the support of commercial structures, could have unified into a large Eurasian mercantile complex those hitherto separate circuits which, starting from Western Europe and the Mediterranean, extended to Eastern Europe and Russia, to the Middle East, Central Asia and China. Although the economic tools that the Mongols could use were limited, it is certain that they introduced advanced concepts and structures to facilitate mercantile activity, limit risks, and increase supply and demand. We will pause here to consider three aspects: the security of routes and markets, specific commercial institutions and monetary policies.

The testimonies of the time agree in praising the security that the Mongolian state guaranteed to the merchants. The risk of loss of merchandise due to the activity of raiders and pirates was one of the factors that most discouraged long-distance trade. Therefore, the reduction in risk meant that investments were incentivized despite the long times that intervened between investment and profit. Furthermore, in the treaties concluded between the Mongols and the European trading powers, a clause was often included that provided for the return of goods and belongings if a foreign merchant died during an expedition. Given the length and danger of the journeys, the guarantees offered by the Mongolian states to European investors made it possible to reduce not only the risk of losses due to robberies, but also the risk caused by the sudden death of the merchant.

The best-known institutions introduced by the Mongols in international trade are *the ortaq*, or trading company, and the postal station (*yam*) system.

The ortaq was perfected towards the end of the thirteenth century, and involved the participation of a Mongolian investor and a merchant. The merchant was a commercial specialist, often knowledgeable of foreign languages and markets, who was entrusted with the task of making investments on behalf of investors

Mongols, but also to procure certain merchandise. ⁶⁰ In a certain sense, the method of commercial investment adopted by the Mongols does not differ too much from institutions such as the commenda and the Link that we find both in Venice and among Muslim merchants. ⁶¹ The Mongolian and European commercial cultures, therefore, although very different in the relationship between merchant and state, were somehow compatible. Mercantile language and commercial interests

they undoubtedly brought the Mongols and Latins closer together, allowing political barriers to be crossed in the name of seeking relationships that benefited both sides. The Mongolian state, represented by the court aristocracy and the high civil and military ranks, therefore became an active partner in international trade, which was stimulated by it. Furthermore, Mongol protection and the passes granted to the merchants who joined them guaranteed privileged access to courts and markets throughout the empire, regardless of political rivalries.

As for the domestic market, the khans entrusted the collection of taxes to merchants recognized as *ortaq*, who not only received a percentage of the tributes, but also earned as moneylenders and usurers, to the extent that they lent money in the form of silver ingots (to which we will return at length in the tenth chapter) to those who did not have the means to pay taxes. As tax collectors the *Ortaq*, often Central Asian Muslims, acquired a leading role in the tax reforms of the Mongol Empire under Möngke and Qubilai.

Various European merchants clearly aspired to make contact with the Mongolian high hierarchy in the hope of acquiring such privileges. An example of the strategies they adopted comes from the notarial archive of Lamberto di Sambuceto. From the documents we learn that on 11 May 1290 the falconer Johanes de Rayna was hired into the service of a merchant, a certain Pietro de Braino, with a contract that would last until August of the same year for the him to the court of the Khan of Persia Arghun. was paid purpose of accompanying 800 aspers plus expenses once he reached the Ilkhanid court. Although the document does not specify the duties of the falconer, and why he was hired, we know that imperial hunting, as a pastime and activity common to all the major European and Asian courts, generated an international demand for trainers and animals suitable for hunting (in particularly birds of prey and felines) among the various Eurasian aristocracies. Therefore we can hypothesize that the merchant Pietro de Braino wanted to use the falconer to gain entry to the court, and establish a commercial relationship with members of the Mongol-Persian aristocracy through his hunting knowledge, and perhaps with the emperor himself.

Regarding the Golden Horde, we do not know much about the specific relationships between the Mongol aristocracy and the merchants, although it appears that Muslims played more prestigious roles in the *ortaq system*. However, the khans of the Golden Horde generally had an inclusive and tolerant attitude. Even towards the Russian principalities subject to them, the Mongols continued to maintain a free and open commercial attitude. The rebirth

Novgorod's economy, which began already at the end of the 13th century, was due to the arrival of Northern European merchants, attracted by the very low tariffs and the flourishing fur trade. Ultimately, a relationship of trust was established between the merchant and the political or military authority which attracted and encouraged investments.

Another aspect that favored international traffic concerns transport support and the reduction of transaction costs. In all the territories governed by the Mongols, trade benefited from the reduction of customs duties, and from the ease of travel guaranteed by the system of postal stations, where merchants and authorized personnel could find accommodation, spare horses and pack animals, and probably guides for travel. The system, known as *yam*, was originally created to ensure rapid communications over long distances (a sort of pony express), but also served as a logistical support service, which allowed the precise calculation of the costs that a merchant would have had to bear for the transport of goods. The work of the Florentine banker Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, is a precious source which, beyond specific information on prices and merchandise, gives us the pulse of times and costs, all calculated with remarkable precision. Such calculations certainly allowed the merchant to quantify costs and profits with a precision unprecedented in European commercial history.

It was possible to calculate, for example, transport times from Venice to Tana – from 58 to 67 days – and even from Tana to the capital of China, between 264 and 284 days. By unifying not only politically but also linguistically - Turkish and Persian became lingua francas - and from a logistical point of view (topics that we will address in the ninth chapter) Eastern Europe and Asia, the Mongols contributed to reducing difficulties, costs, and risks. Clearly they themselves derived considerable profits from the transit of merchandise. At the same time, the well-informed merchant was able to give his activities the necessary continuity.

Finally, it is important to remember how the Mongols had adopted the use of different monetary denominations and above all increased the circulation of paper money in China. First they introduced the silver bullion (we will focus on this in the tenth chapter) as the unified standard of their fiscal policy. The use of this monetary medium allowed the empire to rationalize its fiscal system, a relatively new concept for the Mongols, who did not have a sophisticated governmental culture. The transition to a monetary standard, albeit partial and limited to some areas, therefore allowed the various governments to communicate with each other on accounting matters, and the markets to be able to count on a stable system through the creation of a convertible medium of exchange. ⁶³ However, as mentioned above, the most radical Mongol reform was

the large-scale adoption of paper money in China. Qubilai was aware of the danger of inflation caused by issues that exceeded the government's ability to guarantee their face value. Therefore the issues were limited and the banknotes remained convertible into silver at special exchange agencies.

As we know from Marco Polo (see the eighth chapter), merchants who arrived from Central Asia to the Chinese border had to change their money into paper currency, which would then be reconverted upon return. The ease of use of paper money facilitated commercial transactions and lowered their costs. However, not all Mongolian states accepted these reforms. Unlike silver, which was widely distributed, paper money was not accepted outside China, and roundly rejected when the Ilkhanids attempted to introduce it into Iran at the end of the 13th century. ⁶⁴

In summary, Mongolian monetary policy, despite the difficulties encountered, constituted the most advanced attempt of the entire Middle Ages to rationalize trade and introduce standards that were valid throughout the entire imperial territory. The clear goal of these policies was to facilitate both trade and tax collection in order to keep largely parasitic governments and militaries in place. But at the same time they favored the access of foreign traders to hitherto unattainable markets. It should therefore not surprise us that from 1260 onwards, and especially towards the end of the 13th century, the influx of European merchants towards the orbit of the Mongol empire became more conspicuous and the rivalries between the competing cities, consequently, became they escalated.

¹. The best edition of the *Secret History of the Mongols* is the one edited by Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols*. For the Italian edition, see Kozin, *Secret History of the Mongols*. For the date of composition see Atwood, *The date of the 'Secret History of the Mongols*, pp. 1-48.

². Allsen, *The Rise of the Mongolian Empire*, p. 343.

³. The Jurchens constituted a conquering dynasty that included all of northern China, as well as Manchuria and Mongolia. The Tanguts had long reigned in today's northwest China. On the three dynasties see Francke, Twitchett, *The Liao*, pp. 43-152; Dunnell, *The Hsi Hsia*, pp. 154-213 and Franke, *The Chin Dynasty*, pp. 215-320.

⁴. On the relationship between empire building and taxation, see Di Cosmo, *State Formation and Periodization*, pp. 1-40.

⁵. We are referring to the nomadic empires created by the Xiongnu (Asian Huns), Turks, Uighurs and other populations steppe nomads who emerged in Mongolia and surrounding areas between the 3rd century BC and the 12th century.

⁶. Desmond, *The Mongol Wars with Hsi Hsia*, pp. 195-228.

⁷. The military aspects of Chinggis Khan's campaigns are detailed in Desmond, *The Rise of Chinggis Khan*.

⁸. Francke, Twitchett, *The Liao*, pp. 43-153.

⁹. On the Kara Kitai (or Qara Khitai) empire, see Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai*.

¹⁰. The Naiman occupied the western part of Mongolia, and were one of the most powerful formations policies at the time of the rise of Chinggis Khan. On them see Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 397-398.

¹¹. The Turks were an ancient nomadic people of Mongolia, not to be confused with the Anatolian Turks of later times. See Stark, *Türk Khaganate*, pp. 1-15.

- [12.](#) On the relationship between the Uighur empire and the Tang dynasty, see Mackerras, *The Uighur empire*.
- [13.](#) On the campaign of conquest of Central Asia, see Allsen, *The Rise of the Mongolian Empire*, pp. 354-357.
- [14.](#) Public, *Cumans*.
- [15.](#) Ratchenvsky, *Genghis Khan*, pp. 141-144.
- [16.](#) Fletcher, *Turko-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition*, pp. 236-251.
- [17.](#) Allsen, *Sharing out the empire*, pp. 172-190.
- [18.](#) Allsen, *Prelude to the Western Campaigns*, pp. 5-24; Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars*, pp. 57-68.
- [19.](#) Lind, *Mongol Invasions of Russia*; Sinor, *The Mongols in the West*, pp. 1-44.
- [20.](#) For a comparative analysis of Russia's treatment in the Mongol conquest see Halperin, *Russia in the Mongol Empire*, pp. 239-261.
- [21.](#) On the organization of the Mongol army see May, *The Mongol Art of War*.
- [22.](#) On the Mongol invasion of Hungary, see Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*.
- [23.](#) Rogers, *An examination of historians' explanations*, pp. 3-26.
- [24.](#) Büntgen, Di Cosmo, *Climatic and Environmental Aspects*, pp. 1-9.
- [25.](#) Bigalli, *The Tartars and the Apocalypse*; Schmieder, *Europe und die Fremden*.
- [26.](#) Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*; Richard, *La Papauté et les missions d'Orient au moyen âge*; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*.
- [27.](#) Jackson, *From Ulus to Khanate*, pp. 12-38.
- [28.](#) The full text is published in Heinrich Dörrie's translation, *Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen*, pp. 125-202.
- [29.](#) Hautala, *Early Hungarian Information*, pp. 183-199.
- [30.](#) Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality*, pp. 45-46.
- [31.](#) Guzman, *Simon of Saint-Quentin*, pp. 232-249.
- [32.](#) Dawson, *Mission to Asia*; Pian del Carpine, *History of the Mongols*.
- [33.](#) On relations between Mongols and European monarchs see Aigle, *From 'Non-Negotiation' to an Abortive Alliance*, pp. 157-198; Id., *The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü, and Abaqa*, pp. 143-162.
- [34.](#) Jackson, Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*; Jackson, *William of Rubruck in the Mongol Empire*, pp. 54-71.
- [35.](#) Meyvaert, *An Unknown Letter of Hulagu*, pp. 245-259; Richard, *La lettre de Hülegü à Saint Louis*, pp. 175-193.
- [36.](#) Mirgaleev, *The Golden Horde Policies*, p. 218.
- [37.](#) Ibid., pp. 218-219; Mys'kov, *Političeskaja istorija Zolotoj Ordy*, pp. 53-54.
- [38.](#) On the progress of the campaign and estimates of Mongol forces, timing and geography see Smith, *Hülegü Moves West*, pp. 111-134.
- [39.](#) On relations between Mongols and Ismailis, see May, *A Mongol-Islam Alliance?*, pp. 231-239.
- [40.](#) A chronicle of the conquest is reported in Gilli Elewy, *Al-awā'id al-ḡyāmiya*, pp. 353-371.
- [41.](#) Smith, *Ayn Jūlyt*, pp. 307-345.
- [42.](#) Jackson, *The Crisis in the Holy Land in 1260*, p. 485.
- [43.](#) There is an extensive bibliography on Ayn Jalut. See in particular the aforementioned Smith, *Ayn Jūlyt*, pp. 307-345; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 26-48; Morgan, *The Mongols in Syria*, pp. 231-235.
- [44.](#) Mirgaleev, *The Golden Horde Politics*, p. 223. Polyak, *Novye arabskie materjaly*, p. 29.
- [45.](#) Favereau, *The Golden Horde and the Mamluks*, pp. 93-115.
- [46.](#) Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, pp. 53-62.
- [47.](#) On the figure of Qaidu, see Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State*.
- [48.](#) On the khanate of Chagadai see Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 82-88.
- [49.](#) Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluk*, p. 79; Mirgaleev, *The Golden Horde Politics*, p. 220; Favereau, *The Golden Horde and the Mamluks*, pp. 96-97. The news is in Rashid ad-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, pp. 122-123.
- [50.](#) Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 81.
- [51.](#) Ibid., p. 79; Jackson, *The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire*, pp. 233-234. Both cities, according to al-Umarī's account, were part of the ulus of Jochi according to the will of Chinggis Khan: Mirgaleev,

The Golden Horde State, p. 140.

[52.](#) Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, 76-95.

[53.](#) Seyfeddini, *Monetnoe i deneznoe obrašyenie v Azerbaydžane*, p. 73.

[54.](#) Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, II, p. 75.

[55.](#) Routes and itineraries are described in detail in Sinclair, *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean*.

[56.](#) For a general overview see Ayalon, *The Mamluḡk Military Society*; Amitai, *Diplomacy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 350-351.

[57.](#) Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 85-86.

[58.](#) Bartusius, *The Late Byzantine Army*, pp. 43-62.

[59.](#) Korobeinkov, *Byzantium and the Turks*, p. 205.

[60.](#) Allsen, *Mongolian Princes and their Merchant Partners*, pp. 83-126; Endicott-West, *Merchant Associations in Yüan China*, pp. 127-154.

[61.](#) On the commenda in Venice see Luzzatto, *The commenda in the economic life of the 13th centuries and XIV*. On commendation in the Islamic world, see Udovitch, *Commercial Techniques*, pp. 37-62.

[62.](#) Balard, *Gênes et l'Outre-Mer*, vol. I, no. 513, p. 192.

[63.](#) Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, pp. 56-58.

[64.](#) Jahn, *Paper Currency in Iran*, pp. 101-135.

3. Venice and the Black Sea: from the Treaty of Nymphaeum to the foundation of Tana

1. *Venice after the Treaty of Nymphaeum*

In the 1360s, the relations between the main actors present on the eastern Mediterranean chessboard – the Mongol khanates, the Byzantine empire, the Mamluks and the Italian republics – dictated the pace and conditions of Venetian commercial penetration on the markets controlled by the eastern powers. Alliances often alternated with sudden breakdowns, but the flows of goods traveling within this circuit, despite suffering from political uncertainties, were never interrupted.

In this second half of the century the scope of international trade expanded considerably and the center of gravity shifted to fully involve the Black Sea area. Ancient ports expanded on its coasts, and sometimes new places were created in which to purchase the goods that arrived from Asia and ¹ The most significant European manufacturing developments – effect of these sell the products of was the gradual integration of the Black Sea into the Mediterranean and Levantine trade networks. The Pontic area became a common space, a hinge between Asia and Europe. However, the process of political adjustment was tortuous. As we have seen, the consolidation of the Mongol government in the Golden Horde, the conquests of Hülegü, and the wars between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks on the one hand, and the reconstitution of the Byzantine empire of Michael Palaeologus on the other, had generated new scenarios politicians, whose continuous evolution made any prediction difficult.

Michael VIII had to deal with the Ilkhanate, which had occupied almost the entire Anatolian peninsula and controlled access to it, after having defeated and placed the Seljuk sultanate of Rum under its tutelage. Byzantium juggled itself by seeking alliances with the other major players in the region: the Mamluks and the

Mongols of the Golden Horde, already allies against the Ilkhanate. The emperor's objective was not only to protect the newfound unity of the empire, but to maintain the centrality of Constantinople as a point of reference for the entire [2](#) commercial network that radiated onto the Black Sea.

- In 1261 the Byzantine emperor first concluded a treaty of friendship with Hülegü, and then, in the summer of 1262, allowed the envoys of Baybars (r. 1260-1277), recently at the head of the Mamluk sultanate, that the Egyptian merchants could pass freely from Constantinople, without paying duties. [3](#) -

As we saw in the first chapter, the most significant diplomatic initiative in determining the fate of the Venetian presence not only in Constantinople and the Aegean, but also in access to the Black Sea, was the Treaty of Nymphaeum between Byzantium and Genoa, which, granting the Ligurian city a de facto monopoly on all commercial traffic, at the same time punishing and excluding Venice. Fragile as it was, the reconstituted Byzantine Empire immediately represented the main obstacle to the Venetian presence in the Levant, and even more so to its expansion towards the East. Only the ships of Genoa and Pisa, allied with each other, were authorized to pass -

the Bosphorus. [4](#) Venice reacted by concentrating its efforts in two directions: the consolidation of the system acquired in the previous decades, and the affirmation of its economic and commercial presence beyond the Straits. Genoa, for its part, adopted more aggressive tactics and, thanks to its alliance with Michael VIII, aimed at building a true monopolistic regime on the commercial navigation of the Black Sea. In a short time the [5](#) Genoese ships which constituted the main carrier of all goods, especially slaves, passed from the ports of Crimea to the coasts of - North Africa. [6](#) -

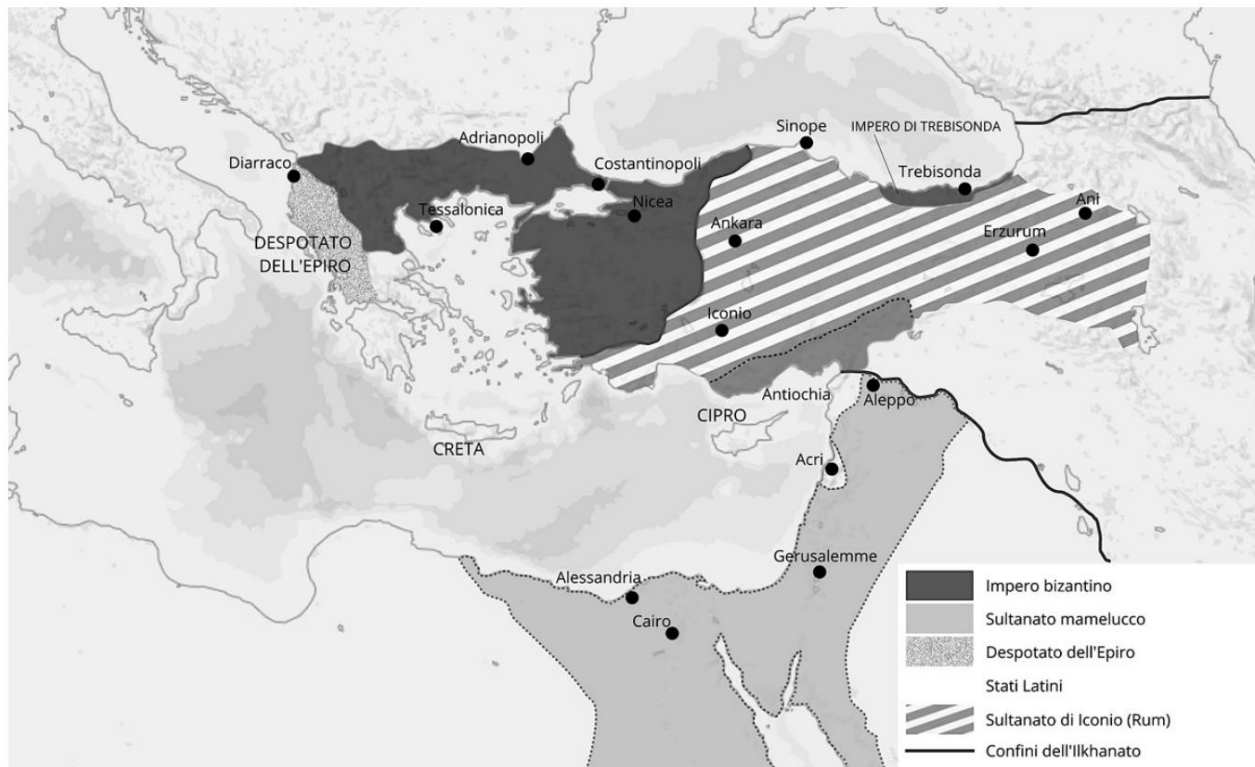
The adversities that Venice faced were not limited to the loss of its dominant position in Constantinople. To this must be added, on the one hand, the difficulties in maintaining control over the Aegean islands, shaken by anti-Venetian uprisings which, never really subsided, were rekindled by the Byzantine reconquest of 1261, and on the other the progressive shift of the center of gravity political and territorial of the Seljuks. Since 1220, under the pressure of the Mongol invasion of the Caucasus, they had moved westwards and had come to occupy territories close to the Aegean and the Balkans. This further reduced Byzantine room for maneuver in western Asia Minor and made overland travel more difficult for Venetian merchants.

[7](#)

Furthermore, in this period, Venice suffered from the shortage of grain supplies, caused by the peak in demographic growth that marked Western Europe, and Italy in particular, during the 13th century.

The prices of basic necessities grew exponentially, in northern Italy, between 1201 and 1291,⁸ the price of wheat increased by 9. From 1250 onwards frequent famines produced crises at a total level of over 140%.

and regional which also involved Venice.¹⁰ The scarcity and above all the uncertainties in cereal supplies both from the hinterland and from the Mediterranean colonies pushed Venice to look for more reliable alternatives. The producing areas bordering the Black Sea, from the plains of the Danube to those of the Dnieper and the Volga, now largely under Mongol rule, presented the ideal solution to respond to potential famines, support the growth of the city, and make it independent from political and economic insecurities. If this was the general strategy, the problem was how to implement it. This made access to the Black Sea the keystone of Venetian foreign policy, the success of which depended not only on developments in the Levantine competition with Byzantium, the Western powers and Genoa, but also on the relationships that Venice would be able to forge with the Mongols .



Map 1. The eastern Mediterranean in the mid-13th century

In 1262 the ambassadors of the Serenissima reached an agreement with the Prince of Morea William of Villehardouin, long a vassal of the Latin empire of the East and enemy of the Paleologhi, who had defeated, captured and

imprisoned at the Battle of Pelagonia in 1259. ¹¹ Freed in 1262, he was eager to avenge the insult he had suffered. In 1263, after a series of skirmishes on the sea, some of which were very harsh, the Venetians, with the support of the principality of Morea, clashed with the Byzantine-Genoese fleet near the island of Hydra, in the Saronic Gulf. The Venetian fleet, made up of thirty-two galleys under the orders of Gilberto Dandolo, had the upper hand in what went down in history as the Battle of the Sette Pozzi. The victory changed the balance of power and reinvigorated the Venetian strategy aimed at regaining the ground lost in Constantinople and opening a passage towards the Black Sea.

¹²

At this point the first cracks in the alliance between Genoa and Byzantium were revealed. The defeat suffered at the Sette Pozzi, if on the one hand demonstrated the resolve of Venice, at the same time reduced the weight of Genoa as an ally of Byzantium. Furthermore, the Ligurian city had proven to be no less demanding and invasive than its rival. If it failed to guarantee the empire the military support that Michael VIII needed to realize his project of full imperial restoration, and exploited its support essentially to assert its own commercial supremacy in the East, the resulting imbalance would have forced the emperor to review the terms of the alliance, or at least its exclusivity. ¹³ Aware of the conflicts that had arisen in the Byzantine-Genoese alliance, diplomatic pressure increased in Constantinople, and in the autumn of 1264 negotiations began to reach a lasting peace, but the—

negotiations were long and difficult. ¹⁵ Venice wanted to establish a peaceful ¹⁴ Venice coexistence, but did not intend to cede its dominions in the Levant in the face of a clear plan for Aegean restoration by Michael VIII. Although the interests of the two states were clearly opposed, the precarious position in which the empire found itself, modest in size and resources, and politically weak, convinced Palaeologus to seek a negotiation that would lead to a reduction in conflict and protect the borders, rather than embarking on an adventurous territorial expansion.

The drafting of the agreement, signed on 18 June 1265, was laborious. ¹⁶ Initially the Venetian ambassadors, on their own initiative, proposed that the treaty define the alliance as "perpetual peace", but the Venetian government did not ratify this declaration, preferring a less binding one.

¹⁷ Thus an agreement was reached in which Venice renounced participation in any anti-Byzantine initiative undertaken by Western powers, and undertook to defend the empire if it were the victim of Genoese aggression. In exchange he obtained recognition of his possessions in the Aegean, in particular Crete,

Negroponte and the Morea. It was therefore limited support to defend Byzantium militarily in exchange for the Byzantines definitively renouncing their claims to Venetian colonies in the Aegean. However, only a temporary truce was reached and not a real peace agreement.

The objective of the Venetian strategy was to understand what margins there were to overthrow Michael VIII and bring Baldwin II (r. 1228-1273), who was a friendly and more malleable king, back to Constantinople. ¹⁸ Venice sought support in Charles I D'Angiò (1226-1285), with whom he signed a pact in Viterbo in May 1267. ¹⁹ With the agreement, the king of Sicily undertook to recognize the Venetian possessions in the Aegean and to support the reconstitution of the Latin empire of the East, reinstating Baldwin II. Furthermore, Venice thought of putting pressure on Pope Clement IV (r. 1265-1268) to promote a crusade against Michael VIII, declaring him a schismatic and an enemy of Christianity. But the political situation in the meantime had changed by virtue of the rapprochement between Orthodox and Catholics, as Palaeologus had shown himself open to reconciliation, and the hypothesis of reunification of the two churches was also supported by the King of France Louis IX. The new pontiff's support for Baldwin II was to be excluded due to the closeness between him and the king of Sicily Manfred, an enemy of the papacy. The Venetian attempt to recruit the pontiff in an anti-Byzantine function therefore did not achieve any results, and if it is true that the pope issued the interdict against Genoa, this was unrelated to the Venetian plans and had no significant consequences for the political structures in Constantinople .

²⁰

Given the failure of such an ambitious strategy, Venice in 1268 concluded a five-year truce with Byzantium and a non-belligerence agreement with Genoa, in which their respective positions and possessions in the Aegean were recognized. In the agreement, the Venetian Doge Ranieri Zeno who had paid homage to Michael VIII by calling him "novo Costantino semper augustus", obtained permission to enter the Black Sea.

²¹ The merchants of Venice also had the right to

purchase grain, as long as they did not trade with the enemies of ²² Byzantium.

— However, they were still prohibited from entering the Sea of Azov and from landing there Tana. ²³ In the meantime the Genoese settled in Pera, destined to become the ²⁴ their main overseas trading base until the Ottoman conquest.

While Venice was re-establishing relations with the Paleologhi, Byzantine-Genoese relations suffered a setback due to some incidents which stiffened Constantinople and slowed down the commercial expansion of the Ligurian city on the territory of the empire.

²⁵ The intense diplomatic activity that began in 1272 led, in July 1278, to the definitive drafting of the treaty which restored relations between the two states and defined the terms of the Genoese presence on the territory

Byzantine. ²⁶

2. *The struggle for access to the Black Sea*

Although Venice had obtained permission to sail east of Constantinople, its position continued to be weak. After the truce of 1268, both Venice and Genoa had carved out autonomous areas of influence in the eastern Mediterranean.

²⁷ Venice prevailed in the western waters of the Aegean, while Genoa controlled the eastern area and the Straits. This placed Venice in a clear condition of inferiority at the moment in which the center of gravity of commercial traffic, and above all of the strategic and lucrative ones of grain, slaves and spices, moved towards the ports of the Black Sea under Mongol domination. Therefore, although it had obtained, by virtue of the treaty stipulated with Michael VIII, that grain exports were tax-free, Genoa had cornered the largest share of the market.

²⁸

The papacy also proved to be in favor of an opening to Byzantium with the aim of healing the schism between Catholics and Orthodox, and Gregory reunification. On that occasion the ilkhan Abaqa (r. 1265-1282) sent a delegation to Lyon which included David of Ashby, chaplain of the papal legate of Palestine Tommaso Agni.

²⁹ The Ilkhanid openness to an alliance with the Christian West, although devoid of practical consequences, demonstrates the growing closeness and mutual visibility of two worlds, the Christian and the Mongolian, between which Venice would have tried to carve out a position for itself autonomous.

The climate of tension between Venice and the Byzantine Empire characterized the entire second half of the 13th century and was interrupted by five-year truce agreements that followed those of 1268, 1273 and 1277. To counter the Byzantine-Genoese alliance, Venice turned again to the Angevins, who had already returned to threaten Constantinople in 1271. On 3 July 1281, in Orvieto, a collaboration pact was signed according to which Venice would provide naval assistance to the Angevin army for the capture of Constantinople, but the plan was once again abandoned after, on 30 March 1282, the anti-French revolt of the Sicilian Vespers forced the Angevins to leave the island. ³⁰ ³¹ It was this last setback of the Angevins that convinced Venice that the time had come to renounce the restoration of the Latin empire of Constantinople and to reconnect the thread of relations with the Byzantine emperor. —

Meanwhile the position of the papacy had radically changed after Michael VIII had not honored his commitment to bring the Orthodox Church back to Rome due mainly to strong internal opposition, and in October 1281 he was excommunicated by Pope Martin IV (r. 1281- 1285). The loss of papal support and the threatening alliance between Venice and the Angevins made Byzantium even more dependent on the support of Genoa, which therefore managed to obtain almost monopolistic privileges, including the full right of navigation in the Black Sea, fully recovering the position it had conquered. With the treaty of Ninfedo twenty years later, on the other hand, emerged weakened, and the same presence established in previous years on the coasts of Pontus, although modest, it was put in serious danger. If we add to this the difficulties caused by the revolts in Crete and in other colonies, soon entered an even more critical phase.

Genoa meanwhile had consolidated its position in Crimea. The inland regions, and in particular the Caffa area, were cereal supply centers of primary importance, and since 1275 the Ligurian authorities had made the eastern coast of Crimea the epicenter of their trade. According to the documents drawn up in Caffa by the Genoese notary Lamberto di Sambuceto between 1289 and 1290, the Genoese export of grains (wheat, millet, rye) from Crimea to the other Black Sea ports exceeded 1,300 tonnes in total.

34

Venice, for its part, signed a new treaty in 1285 with the successor of Michael VIII, the emperor Andronicus II (r. 1282-1328) and obtained the renewal of the privileges contained in the truce of 1277, including exemption from all state taxes for Venetian merchants and all those who traded with them, the restoration of the Venetian quarter in Constantinople to its pre-Fourth Crusade dimensions, the rights of extraterritoriality, and the exclusive jurisdiction of the Venetian bailo over the entire area granted to the Venetians. It was this agreement that allowed the Venetian city to consolidate its position in the capital of the empire and on the Straits. And it is perhaps for this reason that, in the armed conflict that broke out at the beginning of the 1280s between Genoa and Pisa, Venice maintained a position of substantial neutrality. 35 The two Tyrrhenian republics were fighting a war in the Mediterranean which ended in August 1284 off the coast of the Pisan port, known as the battle of Meloria, in which Genoa destroyed its rival's fleet and inflicted a defeat on it which marked the end of Pisa's presence on the international scene. 36

The Genoese settlement in Crimea and the strengthening of Caffa's position did not discourage Venetian attendance in the region. In 1287 the

The Great Council of the Serenissima decided to send a new consul to Soldaia (Sudak), who was to remain in office for a year, accompanied by a notary, an assistant (*famulo*) and two horses. ³⁷ We do not know if this was the first consular appointment, but given that the officer is called "consul of ³⁸ it is likely that Soldaia was the main Venetian base in Gazzeria", Crimea still settlement at the end of the 13th century. The presence of a consul would in fact suggest a stable habitually frequented by merchants, ³⁹ In the resolution such as the Polos, who had a warehouse in the Crimean city. In April 1287 the officer was assigned a salary of 100 lire plus 50 lire and 20 notary. Upon the expiration of the office, in April 1288, the consul's salary was confirmed but the allowance to pay his entourage was doubled, which was expanded from one to two *famuli*.

40

The Venetian expansion on the eastern markets of these years was also facilitated by the minting of coins of high value and wide international circulation, which we will discuss in greater detail in the tenth chapter. The 13th century saw constant growth in the Venetian economy, and in 1284 the city authorities decided to produce a new gold currency, the ducat. Genoa and Florence had already minted their own gold coins, respectively the genovino and the florin, since 1252. In the second half of the 13th century Venice was also committed to broadening the scope of its penetration into the markets of Northern Europe, and in particular into Baltic countries and Germany, as evidenced by the size of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi on the Grand Canal which, born between 1222 and 1225 as a center for importing metals, developed and grew in the final years of the century.

41

From the Baltic, where the best equipped cities were opening up to the international market, products arrived in great demand in Europe such as fur, wax, copper and iron. Northern European merchants exploited the Baltic trade routes and ancient relationships with Russian cities, including Novgorod, to obtain luxury goods, especially spices and silk, through the cities of Lviv and Thorn.

⁴² Therefore, in addition to being a source of cereal supply, Soldaia also took on an important role in imports from northern Russia. ⁴³ Until the end of the 13th century, Venice remained the most important intermediate distribution and sale point, although the presence of Venetian merchants in the commercial circuits of Northern Europe was limited. Reports of Venetian merchants attending Champagne fairs are sporadic, a probable indication that the economic-commercial interests of the Republic were shifting to the East.

For these reasons, the Black Sea remained the subject of intense competition and

of growing tensions. Genoa continued to be fiercely opposed to the Venetian advance into the Crimea. For its part, Venice could not give up defending the bridgeheads it had managed to establish, however weak, nor retreat. In 1293 the Venetian republic began to build a network of alliances to encircle its rival and sought the support of the papacy, the Byzantine emperor, the Mamluks, the kingdom of Cyprus and Bulgaria, where the Venetians had, in the port of Mesembria, a important strategic port.

44

For its part, Genoa had moved closer to the Ilkhanate. Between May and April 1290 a Genoese ship, armed by Vivaldo Lavaggio on behalf of the ilkhan Arghun, headed to the northern Pontus between the Kerch Strait and Ciscaucasia to recover goods stolen by pirates from Armenian merchants active in Caffa. ⁴⁵ In the same months we find the aforementioned Pietro di Braino at the court of Arghun (see

above, pp. 64-65). ⁴⁶ Add to this that Arghun's finance minister, Saad-Addaula (d. 1291), aware of the many technical limitations that the Mongols had on the sea, had called Genoese builders to Baghdad to build two galleys to be used against the naval blockade imposed by the Mamluks in the Gulf of Aden, the main port for connections between the coast ⁴⁷ It is also probable that the naval aid offered by Genoa to the Ilkhanate was intended to patrol the eastern coast of the Black Sea, northern Africa and the Indian Ocean. from the Kerch Strait to the Caucasus southern, exposed to the incursions of the Jochids.

It was precisely in the 1290s that the Venetian-Genoese rivalry intensified in a crescendo that culminated in the armed clash of 1298. Venice also involved in the conflict the cities of the Venetian and Lombard hinterlands, which it controlled more or less directly, as in the case of Mantua, which to contribute to the war effort had agreed to pay an extraordinary duty on goods transiting through the city. ⁴⁸ A first skirmish between the Genoese and Venetian fleets occurred in front of the island of Corone in 1293, but the first battle was fought in front of the port of Laiazzo in 1294, in which the ⁴⁹ On 22 July the Genoese fleet attacked the Venetian one, inflicting considerable damage. In 1296 the Venetians went on the counteroffensive and attacked the Genoese neighborhood of Pera, setting Genoese reacted by massacring all the Venetians who resided in Constantinople. it on fire. The

50 Emperor Andronicus found himself

involved in a war that he had not wanted, but which he had not been able to avoid.

The Black Sea was not spared. In 1295, after having devastated Focea, a Venetian fleet under the orders of Admiral Giovanni Soranzo (d. 1328), attacked

and sacked Caffa, but the showdown between the two cities took place in the Adriatic, in front of the island of Curzola on 8 September 1298. In the battle the Venetian navy was severely defeated despite the Genoese army being in a position of numerical inferiority, with eighty vessels against the ninety Venetians. In the clash most of the Venetian galleys were sunk and eighteen were captured. The loss of human lives was enormous on both sides, and the two cities, exhausted and unable to continue the fight, signed peace in Milan on 22 September 1299 with the mediation of Charles II of Anjou, Pope Boniface VIII and Matteo Visconti, captain of the people of the municipality of Milan. ⁵¹ According to the treaty, all prisoners were to be released, damages compensated and spheres of influence clearly defined without the Byzantine emperor being able to modify the terms of the agreement («nec Imperatori aliquid peti possit»). Every act of individual hostility had to be judged as such and not as a state political strategy, to avoid a new *casus belli*. Genoa had to undertake not to intervene in the conflict between Venice and the Byzantine Empire within the waters of the Adriatic Sea. ⁵² To the same extent, Venice had to abstain from intervening in the event of war between Genoa and Pisa.

The Peace of Milan in 1299 was the beginning of a new phase in the Venetian-Genoese confrontation. Despite the defeat, Venice was able to cross the ⁵³ Straits again, enter the Black Sea and defend its possessions. Genoa had no intention of giving up the supremacy it had built on the Black Sea, and Andronikos II, excluded from the negotiations, refused to recognize the treaty. Therefore the hostilities between Constantinople and Venice continued. In these years, acts of sabotage and piracy against Venetian ships in the Aegean occurred with constant intensity until October 1302 when, after long and difficult negotiations, the diplomacies of the two states managed to sign a truce, but not without resistance on the part of the emperor, who ratified it only in March of the following year.

3. Political developments on the Mongolian side

The Ilkhanate

Between 1260 and 1300, relations between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate were marked by constant hostility, due to various factors internal to the two dynasties, and to alliances in which all the European and Asian powers intervened at different levels. The years immediately following the constitution

of the Ilkhanate were particularly turbulent. In February 1265 the ilkhan Hülegü died and was succeeded by his son Abaqa (1234-1282). Perhaps taking advantage of the dynastic transition, the Jochid khan Berke launched an offensive in the Caucasus, led by General Nogaï, but was defeated by the Ilkhanid army under the command of Abaqa's brother, Yoshmut. ⁵⁴ The conflict continued for a few more months, until, in 1266, in circumstances that were not entirely clear, Berke also lost his life. At the end of the war Abaqa set the border on the Caucasus line, leaving a stable military garrison there to defend the frontier.

Meanwhile, a new threat loomed in the east, this time arising from the hostility of Baraq (d. 1271), khan of the Chagadai ulus. In the spring-summer of 1270, his army crossed the Amu Darya but was harshly ⁵⁵ On the western side, the death of the defeated by Abaqa near Herat. in 1277, pushed Abaqa to launch a diplomatic offensive with the aim of bringing the Western powers to his side in an attempt to isolate the Mamluk enemies, but the maneuver produced no results. ⁵⁶ The Ilkhan also continued to exert military pressure, raiding Syria in 1280. The new Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun (r. 1279-1290), Baybars' successor, however, faced and defeated the Ilkhanid army in the Second Battle of Homs in 1281, thus strengthening the position of the Mamluks. ⁵⁷ Abaqa died in 1282, and was succeeded by his brother Tegüder, who the sources also present with the name of Ahmad, who had converted to Islam.

During his short reign (1282-1284) relations between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks seemed to be easing. Tegüder proposed an alliance to Qalawun in the name of the common faith, but the tone of the letter was not very conciliatory and the negotiations ⁵⁸ also because in 1284 Tegüder's nephew, Arghun (r. did not materialise, 1284-1291), had him assassinated uncle and took over the throne. Arghun, a Mongolian traditionalist who had not converted to Islam, resumed contact with the papacy and the kingdoms of Latin Europe. In total there were four diplomatic missions sent by the Ilkhan to the West: 1285, 1287, 1289-90 and summer ⁵⁹ 1290.

Relations with the Ilkhanate were essential in the Venetian strategy to penetrate the Black Sea markets and reach the Asian trade routes. The cities of the Ilkhanate were key hubs in this context. All the main caravan routes to Central Asia, the Caucasus, Asia Minor and the Palestinian coast departed from Tabriz. In the letter sent by Arghun to Pope Honorius IV in 1285 three Venetians who worked as interpreters appear

of the ilkhan. ⁶⁰ In 1286 other Venetians, Pietro Viadro and Simeone Avventurato, were present at the ilkhan's court, to whom they brought precious gifts (receiving little in return). of the Ilkhanate still seems to be occasional, the result of individual initiatives.

In 1289 the Mamluk sultan Qalawun conquered Tripoli. In the same year the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate again went to war with each other. This time it was Nogaï, the Mongol general at the head of the Jochid army, who invaded his southern rival by attempting to cross the Derbent pass, near the western coast of the Caspian Sea. The Ilkhanid army faced Nogaï near the Karasu River (Western Euphrates) on May 11, 1290, inflicting a heavy defeat on him. ⁶² On 18 May of the following year Acre fell into the hands of al-Ashraf Khalil (1262-1293), successor of Qalawun, also thanks to the help of the ⁶³ Genoese.

Acre was the focal point of the entire Venetian commercial system in the eastern Mediterranean and its fall closed the most important access to the Asian routes. The papal bans on trade with the Mamluks dealt a further blow to relations with the Islamic East. ⁶⁴ The Mongol conquest, on the other hand, guaranteed the opening of a new and alternative space to the closures imposed by the expulsion of Westerners from Palestine, and for this ⁶⁵ it was necessary to access the Black Sea.

The progressive Venetian opening to Mongol Persia must be seen in this complex geopolitical situation. According to Marin Sanudo, the ilkhan was a natural ally of the Latin crusaders as "the sworn enemy of the sultan and the khan of the Northern Tatars". ⁶⁶ Although political relations with the Ilkhanate were not framed in a formal diplomatic context, Venice sought dialogue starting from the end of the 13th century. From 1305 a Venetian mercantile community was certainly present in Tabriz, although the conversion to Islam by Ghazan Ilkhan (1271-1304), and its adoption as the state religion, had made it more difficult for merchants to remain in Mongol Persia. ⁶⁷ Ghazan died in 1304 and his half-brother and successor Oljeitu was more tolerant. In 1306 he sent a diplomatic mission to Venice which granted protection and freedom of movement to Venetian merchants ("vadant et veniant salvi et securi") and citizens in general ("vestri mercatores et vestra gens") who were not only in Tabriz but throughout the Ilkhanate. ⁶⁸ With the same provision any previous tax liability that the Venetian merchants had on the territory of the kingdom was forgiven, to install a bailo with a military garrison in Tabriz. ⁷⁰ Finally Venice could also boast, like Genoa, its own permanent consul in the capital of the Ilkhanate.

⁶⁹and was granted to the Venetian authorities

The Ulus Jochi

The Pontic region had become a privileged destination for accessing international trade flows due to the rupture between Western Christianity and the Mamluk sultanate, which had made Middle Eastern routes impassable.

⁷¹ *The ulus jochide*, firmly in the hands of Toqta (r. 1291-1312), was now a power that extended from the northern Black Sea basin to the steppes of Central Asia, and constituted a necessary interlocutor for the European mercantile states. After having supported Nogai, who had been defeated by Toqta, Venice had to look for a diplomatic way to smooth out relations with the khan of the Golden Horde and obtain space to settle permanently on the Black Sea.

In the 1380s an important political turning point occurred within the ruling class of the Golden Horde. In 1283 the new Yochid khan Töde-Möngke (r. 1281-1287), successor of Möngke Timur, had drawn closer to Qubilai after the decades of latent conflict caused by the succession on the Karakorum throne in 1260, favoring a truce between ⁷² The pause in the conflict with the Ilkhanate could have the Ilkhanate and the Jochids. provided the Jochid ruling class with the energy to organize a new invasion of Eastern Europe in the 1380s.

⁷³ New campaigns of conquest and military successes often altered the balance of power within the Mongol aristocracy. At the end of the decade a conflict broke out over the succession of Möngke Timur between Nogai on one side and Telebuga (Töle-Buqa, r. 1287-1290) on the other. In the end Nogai managed to prevail and favored the seizure of power by Timur's son, his cousin Toqta, maintaining his own sphere of influence independent of Saraj in the western region of the Horde, between the Dnieper and the ⁷⁴ Danube.

Möngke Timur had allowed the Genoese to settle in Caffa, where the ⁷⁵ Furthermore he stabilized and continued Berke's policy of alliance with the Mamluk relations with the khanate of Chagadai sultanate, but without precluding the contacts with the Latins. Conflicts within the Golden Horde forced Venice and Genoa to take one side or the other, hoping that the chosen faction would prevail. For Venice, having supported Nogai created tensions in relations with Toqta, while Genoa, favored from a political point of view, was unable to exploit the advantage, and in the following years came into conflict with the khan, as we will see later.

In 1291, the Venetian Senate decided to send an embassy to Nogai, which le sources indicate, not without some reason, the title of *imperator noqa*.

Unfortunately we have no documentary evidence of this mission and therefore it is not possible to know with certainty what relations existed between Venice and Nogai. However, it is conceivable, considering the general Venetian strategy of replacing Genoa as the Golden Horde's privileged commercial interlocutor, that it was a request for the granting of land to settle in, tax advantages, and perhaps an alliance against the Genoese of Caffa.

This attempt could also presumably take advantage of the traditional closeness of the Ligurian republic with the Ilkhanate. The strategic objective of the ambassadors was in any case the strengthening of the Venetian presence in Crimea, in those years under the control of Nogai himself. ⁷⁷

Direct descendant of Jochi, and nephew of Berke, Nogai had distinguished himself above all as commander of the Jochid army in the war against the Ilkhanate. Batu had already previously handed over to him, as an area under his direct control, the westernmost part of the Golden Horde, roughly corresponding to portions of today's Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia and Ukraine, in practice the territory between the Corsicans lower reaches of the Danube and Don. This region became his economic and political base, and he exercised sovereign control over it. Although he never proposed himself as khan of the Golden Horde, Nogai in fact had enormous power, and directly influenced the politics of the state.

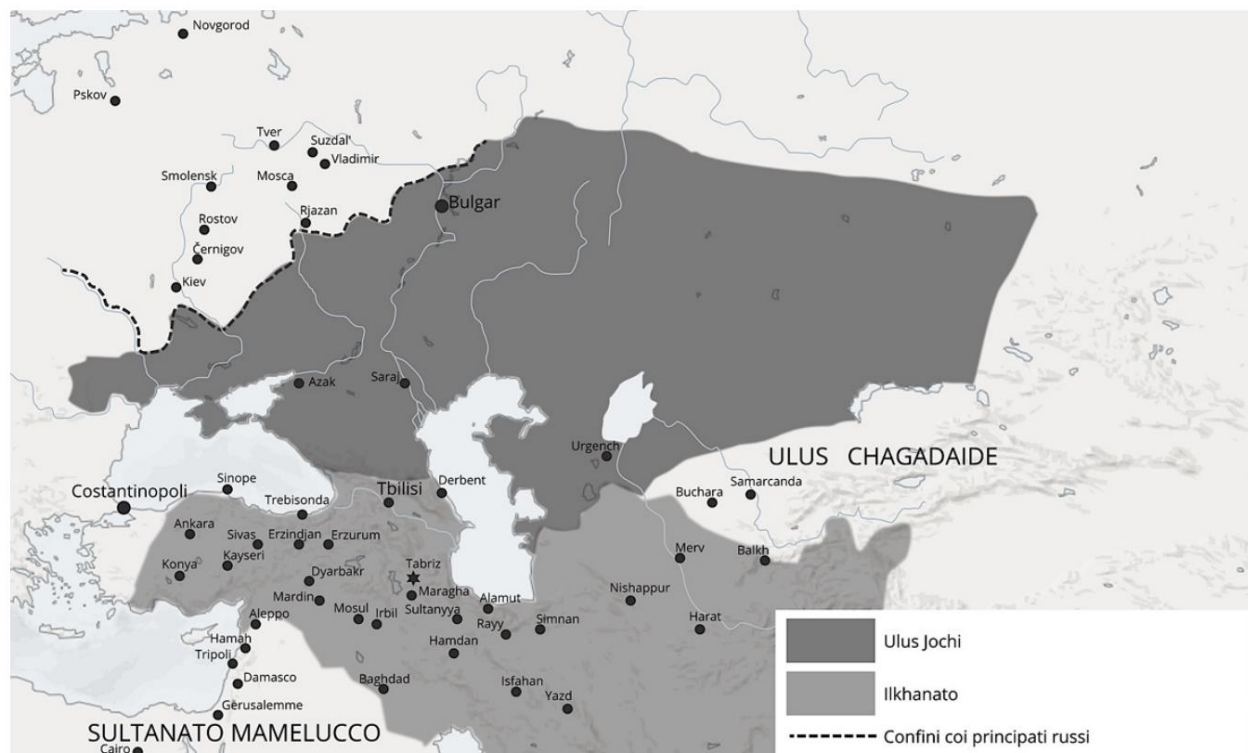
Upon the death of Möngke Timur it was not difficult for him to impose himself on his successor, Töde-Möngke (r. 1280-87) who proved to be a weak and ineffective monarch. During this period, in 1284-85, Nogai and Telebuga had invaded Hungary again, but the expedition encountered stiff resistance and the Mongols were effectively defeated. In 1287 Nogai forced Töde-Möngke to cede the crown to his nephew Telebuga, without however giving up his power, and indeed increasing it. In this period of effective co-regency Nogai established a series of relationships with foreign states, thus boasting sovereign prerogatives. In conflict with Telebuga, who resented his power, Nogai captured him and handed him over to Toqta, his enemy, who put him to death and succeeded him in 1291. Nogai's power and independence also worried Toqta and the conflict resurfaced even more harsh.

To define and expand their respective areas of influence, the two Mongol leaders interfered in the internal affairs of their neighbors both in the Balkans and among the Russian principalities, supporting one or the other faction according to their convenience. For Nogai it was a question of firmly maintaining the privileges and political weight he had acquired long ago. For Toqta it was instead the exercise of legitimate power, conferred on him by his position as ruler of the Horde. Between the end of 1293 and the beginning of the following year the khan undertook to assert his authority over

northern Russian principalities, eliminating the privileges of the local aristocracy (both Russian and Mongolian) loyal to Nogai.⁷⁸ In a clear challenge to imperial power, Nogai began to mint coins, at least from 1296, with his effigy. It was, in fact, a declaration of war and soon the two sides faced each other in battle. The first clash took place in 1297 on the Aksai river, near the mouth of the Don, and was a success for Nogai, who at this point decided to extend his control over the mercantile trading bases in Crimea.⁷⁹

At the end of 1298 (or in the first days of 1299) Nogai attacked and conquered The ⁸⁰ followed by Caffa, which was besieged, stormed and burned. ⁸¹ Soldaia, attack on Caffa was justified as retaliation for the assassination by the Genoese of one of his nephews sent to the city to collect the requested tribute. ⁸² if this was — But the triggering cause, it can be hypothesized that the basis of the conflict was the desire of the Mongolian commander to take possession of the ports of Crimea colonized by the Genoese. We are not able to establish with certainty whether any formal agreement had been signed between Venice and Nogai, but it is likely that there was an agreement, if we take into account the embassy mentioned above and the strategic convergence, aimed at weakening Genoa's position .

After the battle on the Aksai River the tide of the conflict began to change in favor of Toqta. Nogai, who perhaps could no longer count on the support of the military aristocracy, sought help from the Ilkhanate of Ghazan, a Muslim like him and hostile to Toqta like him. ⁸³ But instead of accepting the offer, Ghazan signed an agreement with the Jochide khan under which he promised not to intervene in the internal affairs of the Golden Horde. ⁸⁴ We cannot exclude that at the basis of Ghazan's decision there was also an intervention by Genoa, a necessary commercial interlocutor for the ilkhán, which Nogai had attacked in Crimea.



Map 2. The Ulus Jochi and the Ilkhanate at the end of the 13th century

Toqta and Nogaï came to a showdown in the final years of the century. The respective armies clashed in the autumn of 1298 on the lower course of the Don, while Nogaï was still busy in the Crimea. The decisive battle, however, was fought between the end of 1299 and the beginning of the following year on the Kukanlyk plain, at the mouth of the Dniester.⁸⁵ Here Nogaï was definitively defeated and, having fallen prisoner of a Russian contingent that was part of Toqta's army, was executed on the spot by a soldier.⁸⁶ The end-

of the civil war did not lead to an immediate normalization of the political balance within the Golden Horde. Hotbeds of rebellion remained active for at least two years, especially in the Balkans, along the Danube, where Nogaï had many faithful and where his son, Chaka (d. 1300), was still in command.⁸⁷ The consequences of the conflict had severely affected the economy of the Pontic region between the Dnieper and the Danube, and caused enormous damage to the population. Genoa and Venice had to navigate the politics of the Horde in order not to lose the positions acquired in the northern and eastern Black Sea, as well as on the Danube coast.

4. Venice, Genoa and the Mongols on the Black Sea and in Persia in the former

years of the fourteenth century

In the system of relations between the dominant powers of the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the rivalry between the two Italian republics had not died down at all. It is above all from this perspective that the peace stipulated by Venice with the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II in 1302 should be read. In the early years of the fourteenth century Venice had pacified the most restless colonies of the Aegean and, after having stabilized relations with Byzantium and Genoa, the Republic could finally concentrate on sailing beyond the Straits. The desire and need to establish themselves at the center of international routes pushed the authorities of the Serenissima to promote a new diplomatic effort towards the Golden Horde.

Venice's primary objective was to obtain space in Tana, located at the mouth of the Don.

The locality, a portion of the populous city of Azaq, owed its commercial success both to the richness of local production and to its function as a terminal for goods coming from the northern areas of Rus' - roughly today's Ukraine, Belarus and European Russia - and from Central Asian ones, to be then distributed to Western and North African markets. ⁸⁸ The archive of the aforementioned Genoese notary Lamberto di Sambuceto, who resided in Caffa from 23 April 1289 to 12 August of the following year, is one of the main sources to illustrate the city's activity on the Sea of Azov. ⁸⁹ In that period the notary stipulated 133 commendation contracts out of a total of 903, to which must be added another 54 contracts which have previously stipulated commendations as their object.

⁹⁰ These data, although relating to a single notary and to a limited period, indicate that commercial relations between Caffa and Tana amounted to 340,354 aspers (almost ⁹¹ and this is the largest volume documents. ⁹² of trade between the 7,500 ducats), Pontine commercial centers mentioned in While the sources testify to the presence of Latin merchants in Tana, they do not allow us to establish the actual size and population of the settlement.

In Tana, as in the entire Black Sea basin, beyond conflicts and diplomatic negotiations, it was above all travelers and merchants who dictated the timing of Venetian expansion, often autonomously and in anticipation of state initiatives, taking advantage of open spaces by Mongolian governments, which do not appear bound by diplomatic protocols. In other words, towards the end of the thirteenth century the Venetian expansion, like that of Genoa, represents a case of *flag follows the trade*, in which it was commercial interests that brought the state, with its apparatus, into the colonies that were gradually established.

It must also be remembered that Latin Christianity in general had little

influence on the Mongols from a cultural and religious point of view. The Mongol courts absorbed elements of Islamic and Chinese culture and converted the Golden Horde and Ilkhanate to Islam, and China to Buddhism. Europe did not have a particularly important role towards the Mongol elites, who had been attracted and influenced above all by Asian civilizations and religions. ⁹³ The Europeans gradually acquired an increasing weight in the Mongol empire due to their commercial importance. International trade, which remained the main economic resource of the khanates facing the West, would not have been possible without the development of the mercantile colonies on the Black Sea, bridgeheads of deeper commercial networks radiating across the entire Eurasian continent.

Mongolian diplomacy did not show particular sensitivity towards the differences between the various European states and monarchies. Although the Mongols made treaties with various political entities, they rarely appreciated their rivalries and antagonisms. From what emerges from diplomatic correspondence, the very intricate political relations between the various European states were impenetrable even to a people accustomed to tribal divisions and intense inter-ethnic conflicts. The tensions between Genoa and Venice continued, for example, to figure in diplomatic relations with the Mongolian authorities, as Venice above all repeatedly asked for protection against abuses and violence attributed to the Genoese. The Mongols limited themselves to recording these differences, and trying to maintain equidistant relationships, but other times their reaction to alleged violations affected both, regardless of who, Venetians and Ligurians, was responsible for the offense. This had tangible consequences, especially on a legal level. If a "Frankish" committed an infraction, the punishment could be imposed on the entire Latin community regardless of the accused's citizenship.

Although this should have favored a sort of coalition and commonality of interests among the Latins who operated on the Black Sea, and although appeals to Christian solidarity are often found in the communications between the two doges, the competition was stronger than any push for common action. Furthermore, such tensions were often the result of broader conflicts, which involved the two cities outside of Pontus, and which then had repercussions at a local level. Conversely, conflicts that arose on the Black Sea could be transferred to other theaters. That said, it is very frequent to find examples of commercial agreements and sales between Genoese and Venetians, which demonstrate the existence of exchanges and relationships beyond mutual hostility.

If the experience of the Polo brothers exemplifies the open attitude shown by the Mongols towards foreign merchants, it was not an isolated case. Other Europeans had preceded them, albeit with different methods and intentions. ⁹⁴ Some

Venetians exploited the southern route and in particular the Middle Eastern ports.

These were active in Tabriz already at the beginning of the 1360s, practically almost simultaneously with the arrival of Hülegü. The will drawn up in 95 is a Tabriz proof by the Venetian merchant Pietro 1263, documentary evidence that provides us with at least two important pieces of information: the absence of other Venetians among the witnesses to the act and the conspicuous commercial activity of Vilioni in December 96. Probably in Tabriz, in 1263, there was no stable Venetian community, Vilioni himself. but merchants passing through on their way to the East. These benefited from the presence of other Italian communities already established *on site*, in particular the Genoese one but also Tuscany, as can be seen from the linguistic characteristics of the deed, of Pisan or Lucca origin. 97

Vilioni was traveling with a substantial load of valuable goods that had been entrusted to him by compatriots. Crystals, precious stones, pearls, silver, chessboards, a "crystal work" saddle, and "green silk" are just some of the assets mentioned in the will, which contains the names of all those who had entrusted them to him. Among these Maffeo Migiano, Leonardo Minio and Marco Eviso are Venetians. Another Venetian merchant, Paolo Dandolo, appears as the owner of pearls and precious stones entrusted to Vilioni. 98 «White» German and Venetian cloths belonged to Agnese Bogio, and other Venetian cloths to a certain Ser Stefano from Luglano. Instead, the products purchased in Tabriz, to be taken to Venice, were all owned by Vilioni himself, who was clearly part of a larger business network and also had interests in Acri. His case, however, should not suggest that the Venetians held a leading position in the Ilkhanate. They were the last arrivals, preceded by Genoese, Armenians and Byzantines. 99 Only at the beginning of the fourteenth century did Venice establish a regular presence in Tabriz, Trebizond, and Tana.

5. *Venice and Tana: from mercantile port to stable settlement*

As we have seen, the acquisition of a permanent settlement in the Crimea was initially precluded by Venice by the dominance of Genoa. The Venetians limited themselves to frequenting the most important ports of the peninsula, but at the same time they went beyond the Kerch Strait and up to the mouth of the Don to look for a space in which to operate permanently. However, it is difficult to draw a precise chronological framework. The sources we have, however abundant, lack continuity, and do not allow us to establish with certainty when the Italian merchants arrived in Tana. It is known for certain that the Genoese arrived and settled there many years in advance. According to Heyd's studies, based on the most

ancient cartographic attestations, including that of Pietro Visconti and his brothers Pizigani (from 1318 and 1347 respectively), at its beginning we find the settlement on the left bank of the southern arm of the Don delta. [100](#)

Heyd also maintained that Tana appeared for the first time on a map compiled in 1306 by a certain Giovanni, curate of the church of S. Marco of [101](#) The settlement Genoa. [also](#) appears in the Luxoro Atlas (early 14th century) with the name of *Tanna*. [102](#)

The first Western travelers to enter the steppes north of the Black Sea were Catholic missionaries between the 1330s and 1350s, none of whom mention Tana. For example, the aforementioned Dominican

Julian, who had reached the banks of the Volga, makes no mention of Tana. [103](#) In 1246 the Umbrian Franciscan Giovanni di Pian del Carpine wrote that he had met a group of Italian merchants in Kiev, who had arrived in the city passing through the «territory of the Tartars», after leaving Constantinople. [104](#)

Not even William of Rubruck, who visited the Crimea in 1253, mentions Tana, but limits himself to writing that «to the east of that province [Soldaia, Sudak], furthermore, there is a city called Matrica where the river Tanai [the Don] enters the Pontic Sea through a mouth 12 miles wide [...]. The merchants who come from Constantinople and who reach the aforementioned city of Matrica, however, send their boats up to the Tanai River to buy dried fish, especially [105](#) sturgeon."

The first mention of a mercantile presence in Tana dates back to the 1370s. This is the Genoese merchant Oberto de Serra, who on 31 October 1276 was in possession of «Tana silk», which he sold to Puccio Ronchini for [106](#). The pause in the conflict ~~seventies~~ marked, as we have seen, a Lucca «for 656 lire». between Venice, Genoa and the Byzantine Empire, and it is plausible that the Venetians went so far as to trade within the territory of the Golden Horde in this phase, but we have no certain data in this regard.

In the 1380s Tana supplanted Soldaia as the most important commercial port on the Black Sea after Caffa, not so much due to the quantity of merchants who lived there, which was still considerable, but due to its geographical location. In conclusion, considering the times of growth of the two communities in the region, it is probable that the Genoese settlement was born and developed from the end of the sixties and that the Venetians arrived there only towards the end of the century, when Tana was already [107](#) a very dynamic international trade center. [108](#) A great variety of goods passed through the city, the main ones being fabrics, fish, wine, and cereals, which were among other things transported not only towards Constantinople and the Mediterranean basin,

but also in other Black Sea ports, demonstrating the growing role of European merchants in local trade and a process of integration of regional economic spaces.

At the beginning of the 14th century, the Genoese settlement in Tana had already equipped itself with an administrative structure. From 1304 a consul, Ansaldo Spinola, certainly operated in the city, and in October 1307¹⁰⁹ the notary Francesco di Saliceto rogated there in his house before whom Obertino di Pontenure and Oberto di Pasamorte, both from Piacenza, stipulated a partnership contract in limited partnership. ¹¹⁰ The Venetians, who also frequented Tana in these years, did not yet have their own institutional presence there.

The settlement of Italian merchants was also favored and supported by the Jochids who, like all Mongol rulers, had an interest in encouraging trade, but the growing organized presence of the Latins and their economic power gradually became more cumbersome and difficult to regulate. Western merchants were primarily accused of participating in the kidnapping and trafficking of children and young "Tatars", then sold as slaves. ¹¹¹ This accusation had a concrete basis in the incessant flow of slaves that the Genoese bought in Mongol territory and resold to the Mamluks in Egypt, and was the reason for continuous friction and punitive measures undertaken by the khan to stem the phenomenon. ¹¹² If Toqta's reaction was justified by the fact that the —

buying and selling of young Mongols could not be tolerated, expressly prohibited by the laws of the Horde, it is also true that the growing economic and political weight of Caffa was a source of irritation and concern for the khan. As we have seen, Toqta had prevailed over his main antagonist Nogai only in 1299, and had managed to guarantee some political stability to the state with difficulty. All these factors – the slave trade, the Latin intrusiveness in the empire and the difficult political consolidation – represented a potential threat to the integrity of his power as sovereign.

To react to the abuses of the Latins, but perhaps even more to impose the weight of his own authority, in 1307 Toqta arrested all the Genoese merchants who were then operating in Saraj, and besieged Caffa. On May 21, 1308, after strenuous resistance and over eight months of siege, the population set fire to the city and fled by sea.

¹¹³ The Mongols sealed their success by forbidding Westerners without exception to frequent any city under their control. The economic damage suffered by Genoa, and secondarily by Venice, was enormous. If until the early years of the fourteenth century the Latin presence - Genoese in particular - had grown without a precise legal definition, and supported by the state of

weakness of the central power of the Golden Horde, Toqta's show of strength had had a regulating effect. The Mongols were determined to regulate the Latin presence on their territory and the subsequent treaties signed between Venice and the Golden Horde show how careful the khans were to establish a clear legal framework for foreign settlements on their territory.

After abandoning their positions on the northern Black Sea, Italian merchants deserted the Golden Horde for a few years. The Genoese returned to Caffa only in 1311, and in the same year we have traces of Riccobono Palmerio's notarial activity in Tana.

[114](#) But the situation underwent a radical change following the sudden death of Toqta in 1312 and the rise of the new ruler, Uzbek (r. 1313-1341), who favored the reopening of Latin-Mongol relations.

The new khan was a devout Muslim, and from the beginning of his reign he was opposed by the Mongol aristocracy who opposed the advance of Islam among [115](#) more open andThe new political course inaugurated by Uzbek included his ranks. benevolent attitude towards Latin merchants, due to need to restart trade.

[116](#) The Genoese took advantage of this and organized themselves to return permanently to the cities of Crimea. In 1313 the Ligurian authorities established a new magistracy, the *Octo sapientes constituti super factis navigandi et maris majoris*, later called more simply *Officium Gazarie*. It was a new body, operating *locally*, and specifically responsible for Crimean affairs. *The Officium* had legislative powers and was composed of eight magistrates elected for a semester, assisted by a "major" council, in turn composed of twenty-four noble and non-noble members, provided they held Genoese citizenship, and by another limited council

made up of six members elected by the Council of Twenty-four.[117](#)

After resettling in Crimea, the Genoese also worked to return to Tana. The city appears in the papers of *the Officium Gazarie* from 1313, but these are sporadic references. Only from 1315 can we speak of regular attendance by Ligurian merchants, who however could not remain in the city except for limited periods. [118](#) From the documentation produced by ~~the~~ same office we learn that as late as 1316, Genoese merchants and those who traveled with them were still absolutely forbidden to spend the winter in Tana or to purchase properties there. Violators were fined 500 gold hyperpeas. [119](#)

The return of the Latin merchants to the Ulus Jochi also constituted a precious resource for the Mongols. From the first years of his reign, Uzbek invested huge resources in building a complex administrative machine and strengthened the army. In relations with Latin Christianity Uzbek favored the activity

missionary, in particular that of the Franciscans, which Nogai, also a Muslim, had already widely supported. For example, the edict (*yarligh*) with which Uzbek guaranteed a broad series of privileges to the friars dates back to 1314. ¹²⁰ To finance this broad reform program, Uzbek invested minors. on international trade and favored the construction of new foreign settlements in Mongolian territory. It *mongolica*. ^{was} the beginning of a new season, the opening of a new chapter of what, with some simplification, was defined as *pax*. Despite the fragile balance in relations with the Mongols, and the rivalry with Genoa, Venice would have participated as a protagonist.

- ¹. Lopez, *Nouveaux documents*, p. 445.
- ². Weller, *Marrying the Mongol Khans*, pp. 185-186; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 91.
- ³. Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁴. Bratianu, *Actes des notaires génois de Péra et de Caffa*, p. ninety two.
- ⁵. JJ Saunders' assertion that Genoa was the main carrier for the transport of slaves to Egypt and Syria (Saunders, *Muslims and Mongols*, p. 74) has been called into question by the detailed study of Reuven Amitai (*Diplomacy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 357-358), who however does not minimize the importance of Genoa in the slave trade.
- ⁶. Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt*, p. 121; Jacoby, *The Supply of War Materials to Egypt*, pp. 102-132 and in particular Amitai, *Diplomacy and the Slave Trade*, p. 351. In 1263 a Genoese accompanied Berke's ambassadors from the Golden Horde to the Egyptian court, cf. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 82; Amitai, *Diplomacy and the Slave Trade*, p. 356.
- ⁷. Also because, outside the capital Konya, the Sultanate of Rum was a territorial space inhabited largely by nomads, emigrants and refugees who settled in the western plains where pastures were abundant. In those areas the control of the central authority was weak and crossing them was risky for foreign merchants and diplomats. On this, see *The Seljuks of Anatolia*, in particular the introduction on pp. 1-22.
- ⁸. Latimer, *The English Inflation of 1180-1220*, pp. 3-29; Bridbury, *Thirteenth-Century Prices*, pp. 1-21.
- ⁹. On this, see Cherubini, *Agriculture and society in the Middle Ages*, in particular pp. 28-31.
- ¹⁰. This, for example, was the case in the two-year period 1275-1277 which pushed the most populous cities, including Venice, to invest greater efforts in the supply of cereals precisely to deal with the inadequacy of local production. See Cherubini, *Agriculture and society in the Middle Ages* (chap. 2, *Men and cultivated space*); Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, p. 75. Alfani, Mocarelli, Strangio, *Italian Famines*, p. 43.
- ¹¹. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 174-176.
- ¹². The Venetians had already defeated the Genoese at Tire in 1257. Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne*, p. 147; Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Curzola*, p. 90; Doumerc, *Le dispositif portuaire vénitien (XII-XV siècle)*, p. 101.
- ¹³. It was not for nothing that Michael VIII tried to delay as much as possible the execution of the treaties signed with Genoa in Nif. On this, see Origone, *Genoa and Byzantium*, pp. 46-47.
- ¹⁴. On the reversal of relations between Genoa and Michael VIII, see Origone, *Genoa and Byzantium*, in particular pp. 46-47.
- ¹⁵. Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne*, p. 148.
- ¹⁶. Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, p. 62; Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, pp. 49-50; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 181.
- ¹⁷. Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, p. 62.
- ¹⁸. Ibid.

- [19.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, pp. 93-100; Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne*, p. 149.
- [20.](#) Balard, *La Romania génoise*, pp. 47-48. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 180.
- [21.](#) Venice's objective was probably to bring back one of its communities to Soldaia, where it had been established since 1253. Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, pp. 113 and 116; Spüler, *Die Goldene Horde*, p. 399; Nystazopoulou, *Sougdaia*, p. 30.
- [22.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, pp. 96-98.
- [23.](#) Cessi, *The Truce between Venice and Genoa*, p. 10; Papacostea, "Quod non iretur ad Tanam", pp. 201-217; Papacostea, *The Genoese in the Black Sea*, p. 19.
- [24.](#) Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 51.
- [25.](#) The first of the incidents that occurred between Genoa and the empire probably occurred at the end of 1272 or the beginning of 1273, when a Genoese citizen killed an inhabitant of Constantinople in Galata following an argument; another incident was caused by Genoese opposition to Michael VIII's decision to grant the rich alum mines of Focea to the Zaccaria brothers. Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 53 and Origone, *Questions between Byzantium and Genoa*, pp. 619-631, p. 624.
- [26.](#) Bertolotto, *New series of documents*, pp. 507. Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, pp. 52-53; For a examination of the treaties see Origone, *Questions between Byzantium and Genoa*.
- [27.](#) Venice concluded a further treaty with Genoa and Pisa on 22 August 1270, which decreed the interruption of hostilities; see Manfroni, *Relations between Genoa and Venice*, p. 372.
- [28.](#) However in March 1278 the Venetian authorities brought legal action against Michael VIII because some merchants had been taxed by the Byzantine authorities in Heraclea in violation of the agreements Karpov, *The Grain Trade in the Southern Black Sea Region*, pp. 58-59.
- [29.](#) Some members of the delegation agreed, to everyone's surprise, to be baptized. On David Ashby see Aigle, *The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü, and Abaqa*, p. 154 and n. 29; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 167-168.
- [30.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 53; Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, p. 152; Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, III, pp. 287-308.
- [31.](#) On the Sicilian Vespers see Benigno, Giarrizzo, *History of Sicily*, vol. 3 and Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers*.
- [32.](#) Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 55.
- [33.](#) Rösch, *The Big Gain*, pp. 234-235.
- [34.](#) Balard, *Gênes et l'Oltre-Mer*, vol. I, doc. n. 7, 107, 184, 404, 409-412, 417, 419, 423-424, 430, 502, 505, 703; Karpov, *The Grain Trade*, pp. 60-61.
- [35.](#) The ambiguous Venetian politics of these years aroused the interest of specialists in the last century. For an overview of the issue, see Canale's classics, *Della Crimea*, vol. II, and Manfroni, *History of the Italian Navy*, but also Thiriet, *La Romania vénitienne* and Balard, *La Romania génoise*. For a more recent overview see Karpov, *The Black Sea Region*, pp. 285-294.
- [36.](#) Ceccarelli Lemut, *Pisa in the Mediterranean in the 13th century*, pp. 1-20.
- [37.](#) Canale, *Of the Crimea*, p. 441.
- [38.](#) *Gazaria* (*Gazeria*) is the name given by the Genoese to the Crimea after the Treaty of Nymphaeum. The term evidently derives from the Khazar Khanate, which from the 7th century controlled a vast territory, from the Dnieper in the west to the Aral Sea in the east, including the Crimean peninsula with the exception of the Chersonnesus, tenaciously preserved by the empire Byzantine. See Pubblici, *Cumani*, pp. 67-75.
- [39.](#) Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, ed. Ronchi, Segre, 2.2 and 2.3, pp. 4-6.
- [40.](#) Canale, *Of the Crimea*, p. 441; *Deliberations of the Great Council*, III, p. 201. These conditions were confirmed the following year, as demonstrated by a resolution of the Maggior Consiglio dated May 1290 (*Deliberations of the Maggior Consiglio*, III, p. 261).
- [41.](#) Barbon, *The signs of the merchants in Venice*, pp. 103-122.
- [42.](#) Martin, *Treasure of the Land of Darkness*, pp. 61 et seq.
- [43.](#) Jahnke, *The Baltic Trade*, p. 201.
- [44.](#) Embassies were organized for each of these destinations. Giomo, *Regesto of the Mixed Members of the Senate*, p. 134.
- [45.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Korzola*, p. 94; Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, pp. 83-84.

- [46.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Curzola*, p. 94; Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 158.
- [47.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Korzola*, p. 94; Bratianu, *Research on commercial commerce*, p. 257; Richard, *An Account of the Battle of Hattin*, p. 174.
- [48.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative books*, vol. I, n. 21, p. 8.
- [49.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 160; Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Curzola*, p. 94.
- [50.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 60.
- [51.](#) Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, n. 390, pp. 391-392.
- [52.](#) «Quod during war, quam Veneti habent cum Imperatore Grecorum, Januenses non possint navigare ad aliquam terram, quam teneat Imperator intra Culfum». Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, vol. III, n. 390, p. 391.
- [53.](#) Papacostea, *The Genoese in the Black Sea*, pp. 20-21.
- [54.](#) Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, p. 87.
- [55.](#) Ibid., p. 88.
- [56.](#) Ibid., pp. 103-105; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 168.
- [57.](#) Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 187-201.
- [58.](#) Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 168-169.
- [59.](#) The second of these missions is recorded in the extraordinary memory of the Nestorian monk Rabban Sauma, who visited Pope Nicholas IV in 1288 and Kings Philip IV of France and Edward I of England. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 169.
- [60.](#) I am Pietro da Molin, Gerardo da Ca' Turco and Giorgio Zuffo. The Latin version of the letter is published in Lupprian, *Die Beziehungen der Päpste*, pp. 245-246. Morozzo Della Rocca, *In the footsteps of Marco Polo*, p. 120. For an analysis of the correspondence between the Mongolian ruling class and the papacy, see also Aigle, *The Letters of Eljigidei*.
- [61.](#) Petech, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 562; Morozzo della Rocca, *Sources for the history of Venetian trade*, p. 120; Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 74. On 6 September 1307 a Simone Avventurato was appointed Venetian bailiff of Famagusta. It is likely that it is the same person (Giomo, *Libri Commemorial*, vol. I, p. 78).
- [62.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Korzola*, p. 97.
- [63.](#) On the truce of 1290 between Genoa and the sultanate, see Bauden, *Mamluk Diplomats*, p. 85; Holt, *The Mamluk Institution*, pp. 154-169. See also Bauden., *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, pp. 92 and 146-151; Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 85 and n. 114.
- [64.](#) Jacoby, *The Supply of War Materials*, pp. 102-132; Karpov, *The Black Sea Region*, p. 286.
- [65.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 160.
- [66.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Korzola*, p. 97.
- [67.](#) Lane, *Early Mongol Rule*, p. 57.
- [68.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 47: «exemplum privilegii quod nuncius domini Tartari portavit [...] illustrious domino duci Venetiarum».
- [69.](#) *Ibidem*: «ne propter aliquod ebitum, ne propter aliquam rem retroactam hinc inde nemo possit vobis petere aliquid, ne dare brigam de ulla re: et ita est meum preceptum».
- [70.](#) Ibid., vol. I, pp. 47-48.
- [71.](#) On the papal reaction to the Mamluk conquest of Acre, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, pp. 42-46; Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, pp. 242-258; Jacoby, *Western expansion*, pp. 225-264.
- [72.](#) Tagüder's letter addressed to Qulawün in which the ilkhān underlined the rediscovered unity of all Mongols. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 198 and n. 11.
- [73.](#) Ibid., pp. 198-199.
- [74.](#) See Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 79 and 206.
- [75.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, pp. 156-157.
- [76.](#) The document, dated 15 April 1291, reads «Capta fuit pars quod ambaxator iturus ad editorem noga debeat habere equitables dcem et imperperos IIII in die pro expensis et si advancingnt deveniant in Cumune»: Manfroni, *Relazioni di Genova con Venezia*, p. 384. Although he was a nobleman, a general and cousin of

Toqta, Nogai was not the chosen khan of the Golden Horde, and yet he was the most influential person among the Jochids in these years. In particular, Nogai was at the head of the right wing of the ulus jochide and had settled on the Danube, effectively declaring his independence from Saraj. On Nogai and Toqta see Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, pp. 509-521; Bratianu, *Research on commercial commerce*, pp. 256-257; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 160.

[77.](#) Bratianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Korzola*, p. 93; The Venetian embassy to Nogai on 15 April 1291 had been preceded, five days earlier, by some instructions that the Senate had given to the envoys. Among them was the proposal to install a consulate in Crimea. The consul was supposed to remain in office for three years with a salary of 400 hyperperes per year, with a servant, three horses and a notary priest. Manfroni, *Relations between Genoa and Venice*, pp. 384-385 and n. 3.

[78.](#) Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, p. 511; Veselovsky, *Trudy po istorii Zolotoj Ordj*, pp. 120-125.

[79.](#) The bibliography on the war between Nogai and Toqta is copious. Among his most recent works, see Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*; Mys'kov, *Političeskaja istorija*, pp. 131-141; Veselovsky, *Trudy po istorii Zolotoj Ordj*, pp. 177-184; Pojekaev, *Tsari ordynskie*, pp. 65-71; Sabitov, *Voennoe protivostojanie*, pp. 246-253. The most reliable source on the clash is the Mamluk historian al-Manjūrī, in Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, vol. I, pp. 110-119 and 122-123. Of reference, although less precise on the succession of events, is Rashid ad-Din, *Compendium*, pp. 257-259 and 441.

[80.](#) Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, vol. I, p. 184; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 161 and n. 79.

[81.](#) It is unclear which sector of the city Nogai actually managed to take. The documents we have seem to suggest that the Genoese emerged unscathed from the Mongol attack, perhaps because they had already fortified a substantial part of their settlement. However, a shadow remains that cannot be resolved for now on the succession of events. Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, vol. I, pp. 101, 153 and 272-273.

[82.](#) Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, p. 510; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 162.

[83.](#) From this point of view, the brief mention that the bishop of Lucca Ptolemy makes of the conflict between the two Mongol leaders in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* is very interesting, when he describes the emperor «Theca» as a good man and friend of the Christians, and the Emperor «Nocha» as an evil and destructive pagan.

Tholomeus von Lucca, *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, p. 234. See also Spinei, *Les Mongols dans Historia Ecclesiastica Nova*, pp. 805-819 and Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, p. 514. Even Giovanni da Montecorvino, in his correspondence with the Pope, writes on several occasions that Toqta is a friend of the Christians and that the route to Cathay controlled by the Khan is the safest. Van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. I, pp. 349 and 351.

[84.](#) Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, p. 511; Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, vol. I, p. 196. According to Rashid ad-Din Ghazan stated that he would intervene between the two in order «not to take advantage of the situation», recommending peace, and to demonstrate his intentions «he did not winter in Arran, but in Baghdad and Diyabekir»: Rashid ad-Din Din, *Compendium*, pp. 258-259.

[85.](#) Perhaps in the Odessa region on the banks of a tributary of the Dniester, the Kogilnikin. See Uzelac, *Echoes of the Conflict*, p. 512 and Id., *War and Peace in the Pontic Steppes*, pp. 65-80, on p. 66.

[86.](#) Uzelac, *War and Peace in the Pontic Steppes*, p. 66; Tiesenhausen, *Sbornik*, vol. I, pp. 113-115 and 122; Rashid ad-Din, *Compendium*, p. 258.

[87.](#) In the aftermath of the defeat suffered by Nogai, disagreements broke out between three sons of the Mongol *noyon* over the legitimacy of continuing to fight Toqta or accepting his authority. The conflict lasted for over a year, until, between the end of 1300 and the beginning of the following year, the khan decided to send an army to repress the forces of the first-born Chaka. Uzelac, *War and Peace in the Pontic Steppes*, pp. 67-68.

[88.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 151.

[89.](#) Balard, *Gênes et l'Ostre-Mer*, vol. I, p. 68, no. 376.

[90.](#) Ibid., vol. I, p. 36.

[91.](#) Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis of the mid XIV p.th Century*, pp. 71-72; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, 853.

[92.](#) The notarial deeds were published first by GI Bratianu (*Actes des notaires génois*) and then, in a complete version, by M. Balard (*Gênes et l'Ostre-Mer*).

[93.](#) DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion*, pp. 81-90.

[94.](#) Morozzo Della Rocca, *Sources for the history of trade*, p. 120. The first was the Hungarian Dominican friar Julian who went to Russia, on the Volga, in 1235, shortly before the Mongol invasion; Sinor, *A voyageur du treizième siècle*, pp. 589-602. Better known are the missions of Giovanni di Pian del Carpine (*History of the Mongols*) and William of Rubruk (*Journey to Mongolia*, ed. Chiesa), in 1245 and 1253 respectively.

[95.](#) Pietro Vilioni's will was published for the first time by B. Cecchetti (*Testament of Pietro Vioni*, pp. 161-165). Stussi, *A vulgar testament*, pp. 24-37. See also Jacoby, *Medieval Trade*, pp. 131 and 159.

[96.](#) As Morozzo Della Rocca also noted, *Sources for the history of trade*, p. 120.

[97.](#) Müller, *Documents on the relations of Tuscan cities*, pp. 95-107; Malanima, *Pisa and the Trade Routes*, pp. 335-356. Tabriz, as well as the entire western sector of Mesopotamia, attracted trade flows diverted in that direction after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258.

[98.](#) Stussi, *A vulgar testament*, p. 28. The document is located in the collection of the Procurators of San Marco of the State Archives of Venice.

[99.](#) Preiser-Kapeller, *Civitas Thauris*, pp. 214-257.

[100.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, pp. 748-749; Skržinskaja, *History of the Burrow*, p. 22; so also in Berindei, Veinstein, *La Tana-Azaq*, p. 110.

[101.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 750.

[102.](#) Nordenskjöld, *Periplus*; Kretschmer, *The Italian Portolane*; Fomenko, *Nomenklatura*, p. 68.

[103.](#) Friar Julian made two trips to Russia: in 1235 and 1238. See Sinor, *Un voyageur du treizième siècle*, pp. 589-602; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 16-17; Hautala, *Catholic Missions in the Golden Horde*, pp. 39-65.

[104.](#) Pian del Carpine, *History of the Mongols*, XI, 49, p. 332.

[105.](#) Rubruck, *Journey to Mongolia*, ed. Church, I, 3: 5-6, p. 32 and translation on p. 33. Matric is of course Matrega, south of the Kerch Strait, on the east coast.

[106.](#) Ferretto, *Diplomatic Code*, p. 99.

[107.](#) On the different hypotheses and on chronology, see Karpov, *On the Origin of Medieval Tana*, pp. 228-230.

[108.](#) Bratianu, *Research on commerce*, pp. 275-276; Balard, *Gênes et l'Outre-Mer*, vol. I, p. 183, n. 467; pp. 316-317, no. 788; pp. 378-379, n. 903.

[109.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 151; Lopez, *In the Lands of the Golden Horde*, p. 463.

[110.](#) Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 326.

[111.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 740, claims: «having learned [Toqtaï, the qan of the Horde] that the Genoese of Caffa and other Westerners were kidnapping children of the Tartar race to sell them as slaves to the Mohammedans...»; see also Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 151.

[112.](#) So too Golubovich, *Bio-bibliographical Library*, vol. 3, p. 173; Berindei, Migliardi O'Riordan, *Venise et la Horde d'Or*, pp. 245-246.

[113.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, pp. 739-740; Golubovich, *Bio-bibliographical Library*, p. 173 (which gives the date May 20); Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 152.

[114.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 152. There are no reports of damage to the Tana settlement during Toqta's attack. It is probable that both the Genoese and the Venetians used the city at the mouth of the Don as a base to return and reorganize in Crimea. Karpov, *On the Origin of Medieval Tana*, pp. 233-234.

[115.](#) DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion*, pp. 93-94; Sinor, *Nekotorye latinskie istoyniki*, pp. 23-25; Hautala, *Pis'ma franciskancev*, pp. 63-103.

[116.](#) Uzbek also opened to Christian missionaries, in particular to the mendicant orders, as far as the coexistence of these in the cities of the Golden Horde was not always easy. Hautala, *Latin sources*, pp. 336-346.

[117.](#) Sauli, *Imposicio Officii Gazarie*; Forcheri, *Ships and navigation in Genoa*.

[118.](#) Sauli, *Imposicio Officii Gazarie*, col. 306.

[119.](#) Ibid., col. 381: «quod aliquis ianuensis vel qui pro ianuensi dstringatru vel appelletur seu beneficent ianuensis gaudeat non audeat vel presumat aliquo modo vel ingenio yemare seu sivernare in Tana seu habere tener vel acquirere in Tana aliquam habitacionem vel domum seu habitaculum»; in the address book

of the *Imposicio* of September 1341 it is also said that «in Tana in itinere differ ibi diebus decem et non ultra sub pena predicta [librarum quingetarum]», *ibid.*, col. 346; Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 751.

[120](#). Kovács, *The Franciscans and Yaylaq Khatun*, p. 58; Hautala, *Jarlik xhana*, pp. 34-35.

4. Venice and the Mongols: the years of consolidation (1319-1343)

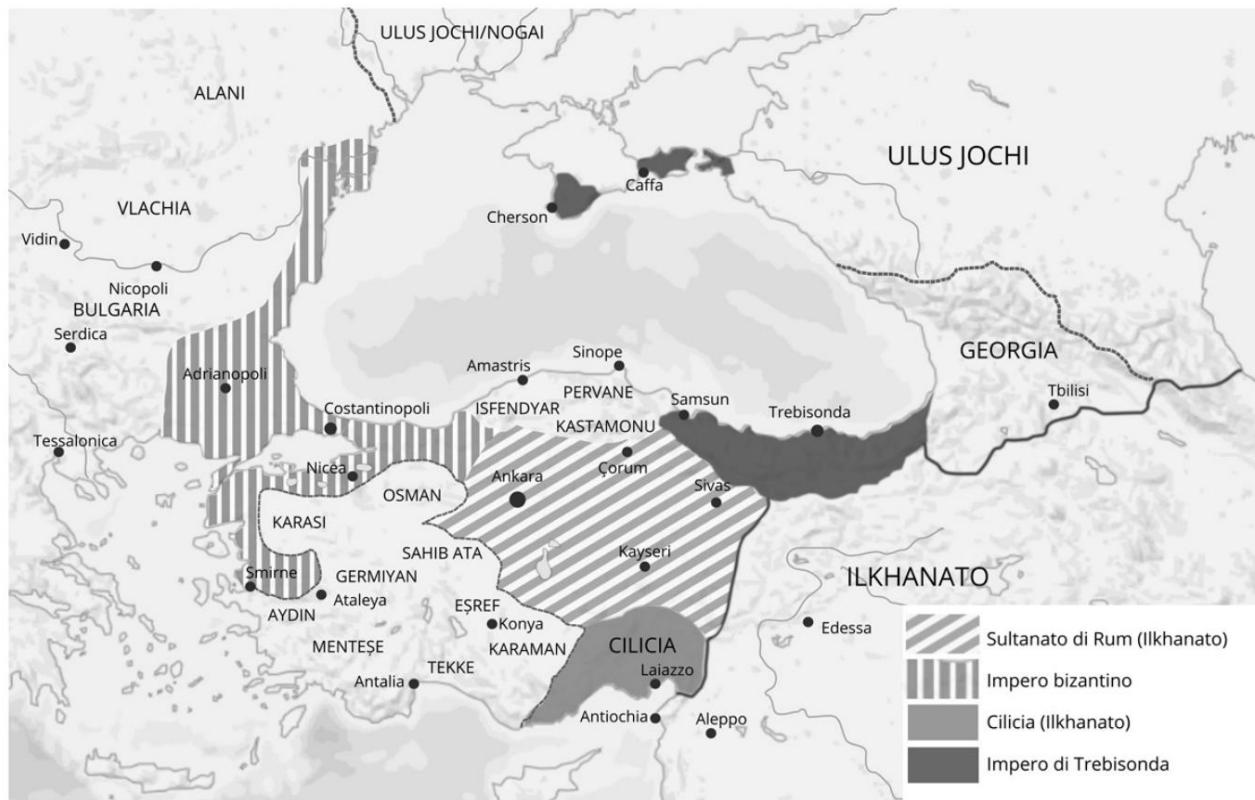
1. *The political framework in the 1420s*

At the beginning of the fourteenth century Venice achieved a lasting peace with the Byzantine Empire which allowed it to explore new alliances and strategies in relations with the Mongols¹. In the meantime, Genoa, which had opposed the opening of Venetian commercial bases on the Black Sea at all costs, entered a phase of political crisis which also extended to the colonies. In 1321 the Ghibelline community of Pera opposed the motherland, where the Guelph party had assumed power.² Venice took advantage of its rival's weakness to strengthen its position on the Black Sea and intensified diplomatic activity with all the states in the region.

In 1319 the Republic signed a treaty of collaboration with the emperor of Trebizond Alexios II and in 1320 the Venetian ambassadors renewed the formal pact of friendship with the kingdom of Lesser Armenia which allowed Venetian merchants to operate in the port of Laiazzo and on the caravan routes which connected the Anatolian city to Tabriz. In the same 1320 Venice renewed the agreement of 1306 with the Ilkhanate and obtained the improvement of some clauses from the khan Abu Said, together with the concession for its merchants to reside in Tabriz, keep a warehouse there, be represented by a consul, enjoy tax exemptions and privileges, and move freely within his empire.

Venice also strengthened its presence in the Aegean, made agreements with the local lords of the major islands, including Negroponte and Crete, and strengthened connections with the smaller ones. The Senate also authorized the start of negotiations with the Khan of the Golden Horde Uzbek to settle in Tana, a long-term project which came to fruition in 1332, when he granted a plot of land at the mouth of the Don on which build a neighborhood, fortify it and manage it independently.

This result, i.e. the consolidation of the Venetian presence in the Black Sea basin, was possible thanks to an evolving political framework, characterized by rapprochements, alliances, and greater détente between powers that until recently had fought each other ferociously. But it was also due to the emergence of new subjects who were pushing to secure a space for themselves in the political and economic system of the eastern Mediterranean. Venice was able to exploit this opportunity, increased and strengthened its presence in the East and itself became a decisive factor in the process of supra-regional economic and commercial integration.



Map 1. The Black Sea at the beginning of the 14th century

The international political framework at the beginning of the 14th century had in the meantime also evolved on other fronts, first and foremost the conflict between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks - the two states in control of the caravan routes and key hubs scattered along the northern coast of Africa at the heart of Persia – which until then had slowed down and sometimes blocked trade flows. To fully understand the evolution of events and the extent of the changes that have occurred in recent years, it is necessary to retrace the main stages of the Ilkhanid-Mamluk conflict, in which both Genoa and Venice were

involved, albeit indirectly.

The war between the sultanate and *the Persian ulus* had lasted for decades, in alternating phases, since the first armed clash at Ayn Jalut, in Palestine, in 1260. The first period of the conflict lasted for about twenty years and had its epilogue in the second battle of Homs (October 1281) in which the Ilkhanid army was severely defeated. In the following years, the progress of relations between the two states was marked by more or less declared hostilities, espionage, incursions and violations of borders, and trade blockades. If at Ayn Jalut the Mamluks had faced modest and unprepared Mongol forces, at Homs Abaqa Ilkhan had deployed his entire army, and the wound inflicted on the military prestige of the Mongols was profound.

[3](#)

In the aftermath of the Second Battle of Homs and the death of Abaqa (1282) the two sides sought an agreement to end the conflict. Abaqa's successor, Tegüder Ahmad Ilkhan reigned for just over two years and failed to complete peace negotiations with Sultan Qalawun (1279-1290). The new ilkhan Arghun (1284-1291) did not change the policies of his predecessor substantially, but intensified diplomatic efforts to broaden the anti-Mamluk front, involving the papacy and with it the powers of Christian Europe.

This did not favor détente, on the contrary leading to a further hardening of relations. During the short reign of Geikhatu (r. 1291-1295), border skirmishes and border violations resumed. The tension escalated into open warfare during the early years of the reign of Ghazan (r. 1285-1304), who attacked the Mamluks in Syria three times, winning a victory in 1299 near Homs and suffering two crushing defeats in subsequent battles (1300 and 1303). During preparations for a fourth offensive the Ilkhan died (1304) and the expedition was cancelled. Ghazan was succeeded by Oljeitu (r. 1304-1316), who on the one hand sought conciliation with the sultan and on the other never stopped negotiating with the Western powers to fight him. Although relations continued to be hostile, there were no armed clashes for almost a decade. Instead, contacts between the Ilkhan and the papacy resumed for the establishment of an anti-Mamluk alliance, but this time too no formal agreement was reached. At the end of 1312 the Mongols attacked in Syria, along the Euphrates - al-Rahba - but it was yet another failure. [5](#) In the same period, the Golden Horde khan Uzbek initiated diplomatic contacts with the Mamluks,

by virtue of their common rivalry with the Ilkhanids. In the spring of 1314 a first Jochid embassy arrived and the following year the alliance was concluded with the Mamluk Sultan of Cairo, Muhammad al-Nasir (d. 1341), sealed with the promise of

[6](#) marriage between the

sultan and the granddaughter of Uzbek Tulambay Khatun,⁷ which was celebrated at the Segurano beginning of ⁸ It is interesting to note that the Genoese slave merchant Salvaygo also appears in the entourage of the betrothed in May 1320, confirming how central that trade was for Genoa and for the entire economy of the region, from the Black Sea to Egypt.⁹

Upon Oljeitu's death in 1316, a state of latent conflict remained, made up of low-intensity clashes which expressed themselves mostly, on both sides, in incursions and raids desired by the military commanders as a form of compensation for ¹⁰ In the spring Minor, of 1315, for example, the Mamluk forces troops. they attacked in Asia taking advantage of the conflict between the Ilkhanids and the khanate of Chagadai, which had broken out the previous year.¹¹ More skirmishes occurred in the Aleppo region the following year, with the Mongols trying to force the frontiers and the Mamluks counterattacking. Oljeitu even went so far as to support a coup attempt to install an Arab pretender on the throne in Cairo.

¹²

Oljeitu's successor was his twelve-year-old son Abu Said, who settled in Tabriz under the protection of the powerful emir Chuban (d. 1327) in a period marked by growing political instability and threats on all borders.

In 1318 Yasa'ur (d. 1320), the Chagadaid governor of Khorasan, organized and a few months later the Jochids a revolt against the government in Tabriz, ¹⁴ in the Caucasus. ¹³ attacked. Tensions between the Ilkhanid aristocracy and the Chuban regency exacerbated the state of progressive decline of the Ilkhanid government.

¹⁵

Aware of the enemy's weakness, the Mamluks attacked in Asia Minor with the aim of taking the port of Laiazzo (1318) and perhaps it was for this reason that Ilkhanid diplomacy began negotiations to put an end to hostilities. ¹⁶ After months of negotiations, a peace agreement was concluded in 1321, ratified only ¹⁷ at the beginning of 1323 in the mosque of Tabriz.

— In a separate communication sent to Saraj, the Mamluk sultan openly declared that he would no longer attack Abu Said's kingdom because he and his court had finally converted to the "true faith." ¹⁸ Although the religious reasons that led to the resolution of the negotiations should not be underestimated, there were clearly political-commercial reasons behind the rapprochement between the two historic enemies. It is not surprising that among the points of the agreement there was a commitment on both sides to keep the markets open and to protect the merchants who frequented them.

¹⁹

This also changed the political balance between the Mongolian states. At the end of 1320 Uzbek put the new alliance system to the test by inviting the Mamluks to join the Jochid forces against the Ilkhanate, but the sultan, who as we have

saw he was reaching an agreement with Abu Said, he categorically refused and actually ordered Uzbek to cease hostilities. ²⁰ The rapprochement between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks harmed the Jochids, since the sultanate could now import slaves and other Asian goods via Tabriz. The Pontic alternative, which starting from ²¹ Khan Tana and Caffa reached the was managed from Genoa. of the Golden Horde had every interest in expanding its Mediterranean, hegemony over the Black Sea trade, but to do this it was necessary to reduce Genoese power, and it is in this situation of constant political landslides that the entry of Venice as a protagonist of Mongolian trade policy.

2. Venice between the empire of Trebizond, the kingdom of Lesser Armenia and the Ilkhanate (1319-1323)

Political fluctuations had an impact on trade routes, which shifted accordingly, albeit gradually, as each route required various components, such as caravanserais, staging posts, bridges, guard posts, and reception facilities.

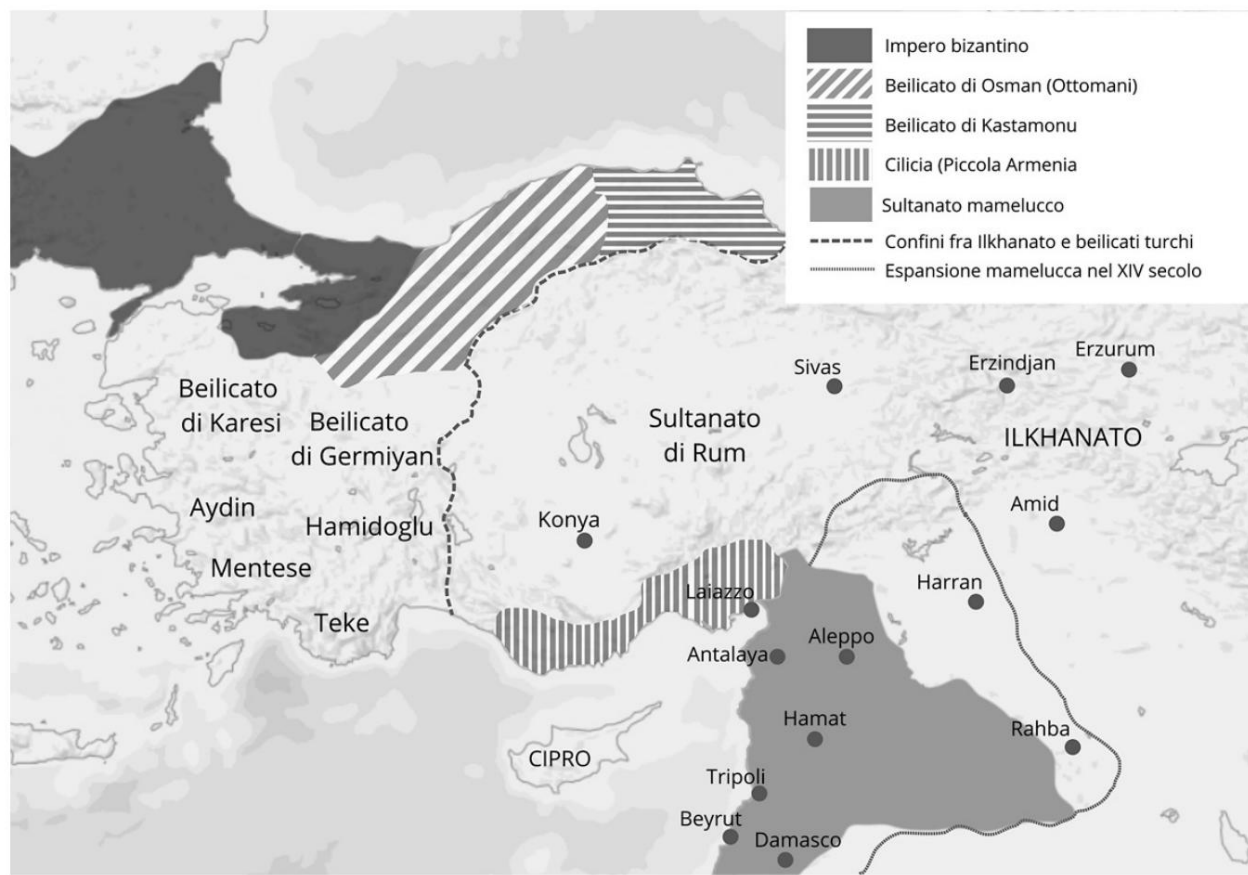
²² The Venetians frequented the more familiar and better equipped arteries, such as the Anatolian and Middle Eastern ones, which had been used since the time of the Crusades. Between 1319 and 1322 the activity of the chancelleries of all the states involved in trade with the East was frenetic. While Mongolian diplomacy was engaged in peace negotiations with the Mamluks, Venice moved on multiple tables. In July 1319 the ambassador Pantaleone Michiel successfully completed the mission entrusted to him by the senate to the emperor of Trebizond Alexios II.

²³ Among the many concessions he obtained that Venetian ships could dock in the city's port like Genoese ones ("sicut faciunt Januenses"). All Venetians, noble and otherwise ("tam parvi quam magni") could move freely. All in all, advantageous fiscal conditions were guaranteed: harsh Trebizond winds for each load (*soma*) intended for sale and 3% *commerchium* on the weight of the goods or on the total proceeds. If the seller and buyer were both Venetian the percentage was halved. Gold and silver paid nothing, except the harsh winds expected for each load. The land caravans coming from Constantinople, Laiazzo and Tabriz were subjected to a tax of twelve aspers per load, while for sales the payment of 1% of the proceeds was established. The Venetians obtained building space on which they built homes, the government lodge and a church. They could elect a bailo with his retinue (*precones*, that is

heralds), accredited to the local authorities, who would administer justice in the Venetian neighborhood. The treaty with Trebizond was an important step towards Venetian expansion in the Black Sea because it allowed it to bring its infrastructure closer to the Asian markets both by land, through the caravan routes that connected the Anatolian port to Laiazzo and Tabriz, and by sea, exploiting the route towards Crimea and the Sea of Azov.

Less than a year later the Venetian chancellery organized the mission to the ilkhán to obtain the renewal of the privileges he had in Tabriz. In December 1320 the treaty with Abu Said was concluded, in which the ilkhán guaranteed the Venetian community all the prerogatives established in 1306, added some new ones, and formally ensured protection to all those who, under the flag of San Marco, operated in his empire. The document reflects the political context of the moment, in particular the growing tensions between Venice and the papacy. After Acre, a trading post of fundamental strategic importance, was taken by the Mamluks in 1291, the Holy See moved firmly to isolate the infidels and prohibited Christian states, including Venice, from and intensity relationships any ²⁴ The ban was respected only with manners with Muslims. ²⁵ irregular, and violated by Venice whenever the interests were too high or the pontiff's attitude was not too intransigent. ²⁶ But precisely because of these violations, in 1304 Pope Benedict

²⁷ Despite this, the slave trade never ceased. In the same year 1304, a Genoese galley with a load of slaves destined for Alexandria had to ^{where} the local merchant Salomon Macomet had purchased ^{divert} to Candia, them, because it was being chased by Turkish pirates. ²⁹ In 1308, the new pontiff Clement V (r. 1305-1314) ordered the bishop of Venice to publish on the doors of the cathedral of S. Pietro in Castello the papal constitution, which reiterated the ban on exporting not only weapons, horses to the Mamluks and war material, but all types of goods («alia quecunque mercimonia») under penalty of excommunication and loss of civil rights. ³⁰



Map 2. The south of the Black Sea between 1320 and 1350

For Venice there was nothing else to do but obey the pontifical injunction, at least officially. Then in 1313 the Senate prohibited its captains from going to Egypt and Syria.³¹ The closure of Acre and Egypt's ban caused enormous damage to the Republic and pushed the city authorities to rethink their commercial network. Venice thus concentrated a large part of its efforts and investments on Laiazzo, Cyprus, Constantinople and above all on the Black Sea. Although the papal ban did not completely interrupt contacts with Egypt and Syria, it contributed to the movement of European trade towards Persia and the Black Sea, a movement also favored by the political changes we mentioned above. Following the détente between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks, from around 1320 the Tabriz-Laiazzo caravan route which connected the Mongol state with the vassal state of Lesser Armenia resumed.³²

From Laiazzo the direct land connection with Trebizond allowed continuous traffic to be maintained to and from Constantinople, at a relatively low cost. In a short time this route replaced the Persian Gulf-Red Sea route for the trade of spices from India.

The Mongols themselves had realized the damage caused to trade by a

long state of conflict. ³³ As far as we know, the Mongolian aristocracy never boycotted the peace process during the negotiations between Tabriz and Cairo and this seems indicative of the fact that its most influential exponents - a generation now far from the ideology of universal conquest that had animated the expansion of the 13th century ³⁴ – had understood that peace was more profitable than war. From this perspective, the treaties stipulated by Venice with Alexios II and Abu Said acquire a clear meaning, being dictated by the need to obtain guarantees of protection so that its citizens could move without risk between the Indian Ocean and Constantinople.

The treaty signed by the Venetian ambassador Michele Dolfino with Ilkhan Abu Said in December 1320, which has reached us translated into Venetian vernacular, shows the Mongols' willingness to welcome and protect Western merchants. ³⁵ The clauses of the treaty are generous, precise, regulate every aspect of coexistence between Western merchants and the local population, precisely establish duties and taxes due to local authorities to carry out their business, and how the merchants themselves were subject to Mongol power in the case in which they were guilty of crimes on the territory of the Ilkhanate and involved local citizens (see [appendix](#)). This also demonstrates how the local authorities were themselves active subjects in exchange activities, encouraging and supporting them as long as foreign merchants respected certain conditions and limits.

The beginning of the paper is explicit: «this is the example of the commandments of Monsayt imperador». ³⁶ It was the Mongols who dictated the conditions, even if the agreement was evidently the result of a negotiation in which the ambassadors had had their weight. Abu Said granted the Venetians freedom of movement throughout the empire, free from taxes and duties not foreseen by formal agreements. ³⁷ In no city of the kingdom were Venetian merchants subjected to levies on imports and exports, but, according to what was stipulated, they had to pay an unspecified percentage of the amount actually obtained from sales. ³⁸ Furthermore, all transactions were regulated and protected by state law. But as effective as the central authority's control over peripheral areas was, the ilkhan was aware that the local nobility enjoyed de facto autonomy, which allowed them to impose arbitrary levies on merchants. Abu Said's desire to limit such abuses is clear in the treaty. For this reason it is specified that Venetian merchants have free movement throughout the entire territory of the empire with their caravans, and are only required to pay the guard fee, or protection («solely el so drito ³⁹ Furthermore, the guard personnel had to protect the merchants loyally").

Venetians in transit in the areas of their competence and provide them with guidance.

In the event of thefts in areas subject to Ilkhanid sovereignty, it was the local authorities who had to find those responsible and recover the stolen goods, or, in case of failure to find them, compensate the victims.

Merchants had the right to graze draft and pack animals (especially horses and donkeys) without further payments («without any chosa») for a maximum of three days; this provision also protected those subjects of the ilkhan who rented the animals. ⁴⁰ The religious people (friars and priests) were granted authorization to profess their religion freely under the protection of the Mongolian authorities in every city or place of the state.

⁴¹ In the event of the death of a Venetian citizen, no one could take possession of his assets, but the bailo himself, or the eldest among the "noble viri", had to take care of the matter.

For example, when ambassador Dolfin signed the treaty with Abu Said, he also obtained the return of all the assets belonging to Francesco da Canal, who had died shortly before in Erzindjan and stolen by a certain Badradrin Lulu. ⁴²

The treaty also recognized the right of extraterritoriality limited to Latin citizens who had committed crimes among themselves. The limitation of consular jurisdiction to the Latin community alone (*from Franco to Franc*) is a principle that is regularly repeated in the treaties stipulated between Venice and the Mongols.

The Venetian bailiff could judge the guilty of a crime "according to custom". Alternatively, the Venetian citizen who was accused of a crime could choose whether to be tried by a local court. In any case, criminal responsibility was solely and exclusively individual, and therefore relatives or associates could not be held accountable for a crime they had not committed. Otherwise, if the judicial case involved non-Western citizens, the jurisdiction fell under Mongolian jurisdiction, even if the accused was a Venetian. This legal pluralism, which associates legal practices with the culture and nationality to which one belongs, is common to the entire territory of the Mongol Empire.

3. Conflicts and agreements in Asia Minor

From 1322 Venice's interest in Tabriz and the markets of the Ilkhanate grew further. If since 1291 Venice had managed to evade (on and off) the papal ban on trading with Egypt, from 1322 this was no longer possible. John XXII's policy towards the Mamluks became intransigent and the prohibitions rigorous, to the point that the senate had to order all its merchants not to frequent Alexandria or any place subject to the sultan's authority

subiectas»). 1308, no exceptions were allowed for the goods that ⁴³ Also on this occasion, as in («vel ad alias terra Soldano could be exchanged ("cum aliquibus rebus vel mercibus"). Since every avenue to obtain a relaxation of papal restrictions was closed, in April 1324 Venice closed the consulate and the entire Venetian community of Alexandria had to leave the city.

— She would only return there in 1345.

Tabriz and Laiazzo became even more central to the Venetian commercial strategy in the East. After having secured the confirmation of the privileges in the capital of the Ilkhanate, Venice also tried to guarantee stability to its community that operated in the kingdom of Lesser Armenia. At the beginning of the years

A formal agreement signed in 1307 was still in force between the two states, but it had never ⁴⁵ been truly exploited by Venice because a few months after the signing of the treaty Andrea Sanudo's galleys had attacked and taken the castle in the port of Laiazzo causing extensive damage to infrastructure and prompting formal protests from the king. Since then, relations between the diplomacies had cooled and the clauses of that treaty had fallen into disuse. To obtain the renewal of privileges in the Anatolian kingdom, Venice began new negotiations with the Armenian authorities, led by ambassador Michele Giustiniani.

very advantageous conditions to the young King Leo V, who had just ascended to the throne (r. 1320-1341); it ⁴⁶ offered Venice opened to Venetian ships, which could unload in any port of the kingdom. He exempted some goods, including hides, leather and silk, a sign that these were goods traded in quantity. As for silver and gold, the former had to be transported directly to Laiazzo, where the royal mint was located, with the exception of half intended to pay the duties in force in the ⁴⁷ Mamluk sultanate.

— Gold, on the other hand, could be exchanged freely ("ad suum libitum sine aliquo obstaculo"). ⁴⁸ The freedom of movement granted to Venetian merchants and the goods they transported was bound to the state of peace in force with the Mamluk Sultanate ("tempore quo cum Saracenis habebimus ⁴⁹ Finally Venice obtained full to state jurisdiction in its own pacem district"). (except for the citizens of the kingdom, subjected justice) and that no indigent person, if Venetian, was harassed by the local authorities. The treaty was ratified in March 1321.

⁵⁰

Having established its own neighborhood in the kingdom of Lesser Armenia, Venice found itself in a politically precarious situation. In 1321 Laiazzo remained one of the main objectives of Egyptian foreign policy. On more than one occasion the Mamluks had tried to invade the small Anatolian kingdom and take its main port, but without success, as in 1322, when ⁵¹ In the army of Muhammad al-Nasir attacked and devastated the city and then retreated .

March 1322 the Venetian Senate asked the bailo of Trebizond to report on the "news" that had occurred in the Anatolian city. Venetian merchants had been attacked and robbed on the road to Tabriz and the authorities of the motherland ordered the bailo to compensate the victims of the attack. ⁵²

The pro-Western policy of the small Christian state, formally a vassal of the Ilkhanate since the time of Hethum I (r. 1226-1270), had pushed Pope John XXII to ask Abu Said directly to intervene to protect Lesser Armenia, but the request achieved no result. ⁵³ ⁵⁴ Even if it did not end in conquest of the city, the Mamluk attack on Laiazzo had highlighted its vulnerability. By controlling the Armenian city, the sultan would have had direct access to the trade routes with Asia, guaranteeing a regular influx of slaves, and freeing himself from dependence on the Italian merchants who dominated the Bosphorus route. ⁵⁵ The political situation was constantly evolving and the changes also affected relations between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde. The pacification between the Ilkhanate and the Mamluks

was echoed by the initiative of Abu Said, who in 1323 also started negotiations with the Golden Horde of Uzbek. ⁵⁶ It is perhaps in this context that the initiative of the Ilkhanate should be read, which between the end of 1324 and the beginning of the following year massed an army on the border between the two states in the Caucasus, probably to quell a local revolt. ⁵⁷ In those months Jochid diplomacy set to work to re-establish good relations with the Mamluks too. The Mongolian ambassadors arrived in Cairo and were received with full honors. The khan in turn received the sultan's envoys at the end of the year or at the beginning of 1325.

⁵⁸ Then, from a situation of potential isolation, the Horde once again found itself integrated into a larger trading system.

4. Venice and the Ilkhanate between 1324 and 1335

In the mid-1320s the trade routes of Asia Minor were threatened by the small peripheral Turkish emirates which had ambitions of expansion to the detriment of both the Byzantine Empire and the Ilkhanate. From the epistolary exchanges between Venice and its representatives in Persia it seems that from 1324 Tabriz was no longer a safe place. The bailo asked the motherland for official intervention to guarantee the safety of the merchants who resided there. ⁵⁹ The Mongols were no longer able to guard all the roads and the merchants suffered from the progressive closure of transit routes, but it was above all the peripheral authorities, those least controllable by the central power, who perpetrated abuses. ⁶⁰ To this they go

added tensions within the Venetian community of Tabriz. In the letter dated 6 June 1324, the consul Marco da Molin wrote to the doge to complain about [the](#) violence unleashed in the city by Querini, a Venetian citizen in partnership with Candiano Sanudo, who had bought Francesco some spices from a Mongol citizen previously banned from Venetian community for reasons that are not clarified in the document. For this infringement Querini was sued by some compatriots, perhaps competing merchants: Gian Michiel, Marco Dandolo, Niccolò Contarini and Andrea Gradenigo. Querini, evidently well-connected in circles of the Mongolian aristocracy, in retaliation turned to the entourage of the ilkhans' mother, and had his rivals arrested. In the end the dispute was quelled, but the bailiff had to pay 260 bezants to obtain the release of the Venetian citizens. Nonetheless, in the letter da Molin states that the city had now become dangerous for his compatriots. [62](#) In October 1325 the bailiff of Constantinople also communicated to Venice that the situation in Tabriz was not easy. [63](#)

At the end of 1325 news reached Venice that other Venetian citizens had been arrested and imprisoned for debts in Tabriz. The Senate decided to send an embassy to settle the dispute, even though the bilateral pact of 1320 should have provided the legal framework in which to operate. As we will see later, conflicts of jurisdiction, especially related to issues of a criminal nature, were the most difficult to resolve. Ambassador Marco Corner was assigned a salary of six hundred large lire (the equivalent of 5,000 bezants), and a large entourage - a notary, a cook, an interpreter, armed guards, an accountant - and money to spend on gifts for the ilkhans. He was also asked to provide for the funeral of Francesco Da Canal, a Venetian citizen who had died in Tabriz shortly before. The outcome of this Corner mission is not known to us, but we know that tensions continued. In June 1332 a certain Hazi Suliman Taibi of Tabriz and his Venetian associates, Giovanni di Andrea Sanudo and Giovanni di Niccolò Sanudo, entrusted a consignment of goods to another Venetian merchant, Niccolò Giustiniani in the city of Erzerum. For reasons that are not in the document

are specified, the goods were lost and the members requested compensation. [64](#)
 On 17 July of the same year the Venetian Senate ordered the bailo of Trebizond to procure 4,000 bezants for this purpose. [65](#)

The death of Ilkhan Abu Said in 1335 marked the end of the Hülegü lineage. The successor was a descendant of the Toluids, Arpa Ke'ün (d. 1336) who reigned just over a year. When Arpa Ke'ün was killed in battle against the troops of the governor of Baghdad in May 1336, the Ilkhanate fell into a state of anarchy. The civil war within the Mongolian aristocracy resulted

the continuation of diplomatic and commercial relations is impossible. It became difficult for the Venetians not only to communicate with the Mongols, but also to organize their own warehouse in Tabriz. The structure responsible for the maintenance and safety of the roads disappeared. The administrative chain that guaranteed the conditions necessary for carrying out mercantile activity fell apart.

It was no longer clear whether the militias guarding the roads were aware and therefore respectful of the treaties stipulated between Venice and the ilkhan or whether, acting outside of state control, they instead represented a threat to the merchants. Added to the dissolution of the Ilkhanate was the definitive conquest of Laiazzo by the Mamluks in 1337, the year of expiry of the peace treaty of 1322 between Lesser Armenia and the sultan. It was a mortal blow to the organized presence of Westerners in Tabriz, thus forcing the Venetians and Genoese to drastically reduce their investments in Persia.

Faced with the crisis, Genoa decided to abandon Tabriz and boycott trade with the city. ⁶⁶ The repercussions were such that the emir Hasan Kuçek (r.1338-1343), recently in control of Tabriz and its region, sent his ambassadors to Genoa with the offer of compensating the damages suffered by the merchants. The resumption of relations between the Ligurian city and what remained of the Ilkhanate was short-lived, as we will see in the next chapter. Venice, for its part, acted more slowly, preferring to stall and observe the evolution of the political situation. The Senate entrusted the management of the crisis to the bailiff of Constantinople without, however, allowing a new consul to be appointed in Tabriz. It took at least two decades before Venice agreed to resume dialogue with the Persian authorities. Already by the mid-1920s Venice was diversifying its diplomatic efforts to secure alternatives. The most sought-after place was always Alessandria, but the papal ban remained unshakable. ⁶⁷ This situation indirectly favored the Sea of Azov and Tana.

5. Expansion of the Venetian community in Tana (1332-1343)

The Genoese had returned to Caffa since 1313 and the city quickly became a crucial hub for trade that passed from Central Asia through Azaq, a populous city located at the mouth of the Don inhabited by numerous mercantile communities of all origins. Genoa had built a monopolistic system in Northern Pontus which worried the Mongols as it constituted a challenge and a threat to their sovereignty. After years in which the Genoese presence in Crimea and Tana had been undisputed, Khan Uzbek therefore looked for alternatives

which did not damage trade but weakened Genoa's supremacy in the region, and this favored the insertion and expansion of Venice.

Until the mid-1220s, the Venetians had not created their own community on the territory of the Golden Horde. They owned business houses in Constantinople and maintained their commercial bases (warehouses and warehouses) in Soldaia and Caffa, from which they reached the Sea of Azov. The difficult internal situation in the Byzantine capital, torn by the struggle between Andronicus II and his nephew Andronicus III (supported by large segments of the military apparatus under the orders of John Kantakouzenos), favored the abuses perpetrated by the local authorities in clear violation of the treaties signed between the Serenissima and the emperor. The Genoese of Pera, for their part, took advantage of Byzantine weakness to increase their influence in Constantinople.

In March 1320, complaints from Venetian citizens residing in the city reached Venice. The bailiff Marco Minotto protested the treatment he received from both the local authorities and the Genoese and sent a note to the senate of the damage suffered by his compatriots. The conditions of hostility were such that the Venetians were unable to carry out their business or resort to justice other than buying it. Among other things, it was difficult to sell the ⁶⁸ wheat imported from the Black Sea due to extortion by imperial officials. Beyond the bureaucratic difficulties, was subject to bans on the processing and sale of hides and leather imported from ~~Venice~~ Crimea and on the export of wood. Equally problematic was the local recruitment of sailors as each hiring was taxed. Finally, the interpreters favored the Genoese and refused to serve the Venetians. In Minotto's letter to the Senate we read that many Venetians had to pretend to be Greeks in order to work. ⁶⁹ Further claims were linked to the fact that, in the summer of 1319, a fire had broken out in the district of S. Pietro dei Pisani in Constantinople which had destroyed many houses, but the Venetians were not allowed to repair the damaged houses. —

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At the end of 1320 (or the beginning of 1321, the document is undated) both the official protests from Venice to the Byzantine emperor and the latter's response to Minotto's accusations arrived. Andronicus II partially accepted the Venetian requests and allowed the citizens of the Republic to operate safely in Constantinople and to sell their goods according to the terms indicated in the treaty signed by Venice with John III Ducas, emperor of Nicaea, in the first half of the 13th century.

⁷¹ However, Andronicus II in turn protested to the doge due to Venice's violation of their respective areas of influence in the Aegean. These disagreements prevented an agreement from being reached

and heightened tensions between the Venetian community and the Byzantine authorities.

Instead of seeking conflict, the Republic intensified its diplomatic efforts which culminated in the very advantageous renewal of the truce in October 1324. ⁷² Among other concessions, Venice obtained the cancellation of restrictions on the purchase of grain in the territory of the empire. ⁷³ The Venetian strategy of definitively settling relations with Andronicus II was aimed on the one hand at ensuring protection in Constantinople and on the other at strengthening the anti-Turkish front in Asia Minor. The capital of the Byzantine Empire was a necessary garrison to direct trade with the Black Sea ports and manage the land traffic that passed from the territories under the control of the growing Ottoman power and the restlessness of the small emirates scattered around the large Anatolian centers.

We saw in the previous chapter that after the expulsion wanted by Toqta, the Western merchants had returned to the Crimea and Tana, the Latin name of the area that the Western merchants occupied in Azag: the Genoese as early as 1313, the Venetians probably in the 1920s. Some documents, albeit fragmentary and indirectly, suggest a Venetian presence in Tana as early as 1320. Armed galleys for the voyage to România, under the orders of Romano Morosini, can go as far as the ⁷⁴ However, in a resolution of the senate dated 1320 it is said that seven Sea of Azov but cannot dock in Tana .

⁷⁵ After this mention, the oldest certain evidence of the Venetian presence on the mouth of the Don dates back to 1322, and seems to indicate Uzbek's desire to counter the Genoese commercial monopoly, but it will be necessary to wait ten years for the Republic to be able to establish its own permanent community , led by a stable administration under the orders of a consul. ⁷⁶

In August 1322, and again in January 1323, the Mongol governor of Solgat Tuluk Timur carried out a punitive raid against the Byzantine community residing in Soldaia, certainly on Uzbek's orders. The reasons are not clear, but it is entirely plausible to believe that they were connected on the one hand to the khan's desire to reduce to obedience a settlement that was becoming increasingly independent and on the other to the difficult coexistence between the Christian and Islamic communities where the former had become predominant.

⁷⁷

The expeditions against Soldaia ⁷⁸ benefited Caffa, which had always been in commercial competition with the neighboring city. By the beginning of the 14th century, Caffa's commercial supremacy over the entire Crimean coast was no longer in question. Since 1316 the Genoese had decided to formally boycott the port of Soldaia, causing serious damage to the city and the commercial communities that resided there, including the Venetian one.

⁷⁹ The diplomacy of the Serenissima yes

he immediately set to work to make contact with Uzbek. The khan, as we have seen, was well disposed towards Venice. Furthermore, the Yochid treasury was in constant need of liquidity to fuel an increasingly complex administration and an ambitious reform plan. The permanent entry of Venice on the Sea of Azov meant securing, through the first European commercial interlocutor, a significant portion of continental demand in the face of an increasingly shifted supply to the Central-Asian route which had its western terminal in Tana .

The negotiations reached a turning point in the early 1330s. In 1332 the Senate organized the arming of ten galleys for the Romany-Black Sea voyage, which left in March with Andrea Geno, the ambassador that the Senate had sent to Tana to meet the Khan and ratify the conditions of the settlement. The mission was successful and Venice obtained its first important concession from Uzbek. The treaty, signed on 7 August 1333, was generous and granted the settlement of a community in Tana, including the right to build houses, trade, dock in the port and stay there for a ⁸² The ⁸⁰ era Venetian neighborhood extended from the river bed to maximum of 10 days. a hospital, about which unfortunately we have no further information. ⁸¹ A duty (the *commerchium*) of 5% on transactions was spun gold, and pearls were imposed on all Venetian merchants , but gold, precious stones, silver, exempted.

⁸³ Venice could install its own consul as administrator and diplomatic representative. Tana never achieved an extraterritorial status comparable to Caffa, but Venetian citizens remained under the jurisdiction of the consul and could not be judged by local officials unless they came into conflict with Mongol subjects. Furthermore, the document mentions previous agreements between the khan of the Golden Horde and Venice, a sign that diplomacy had been moving for some time, preparing the necessary steps for the authorization of the settlement. With the concession of the neighbourhood, Venice proposed to make Tana a hub of primary importance in its Levantine commercial system, a role which however had yet to be tested. For this reason perhaps the Senate left the decision to the captain of the galleys that left in March of the same year not to sail to Tana if he did not deem it necessary, and in any case the stop in the city's port should not exceed five days.

⁸⁴ Having reached an agreement with Uzbek, Venice moved to strengthen its friendship with the kingdom of Lesser Armenia, which seemed to have averted the Mamluk threat. On 10 November 1333 the ambassador Giacomo Trevisan was able to declare that he had successfully concluded his diplomatic mission to Leo V, from whom he obtained that his fellow countrymen merchants could go,

stay and return «in our God-guarded land». Trevisan also obtained that the Venetians could export any type of goods ("bring extra terram ⁸⁵ che come nostram vel quascumque mercatones") Laiazzo, we have seen it was directly connected to Trebizond, where Venice had ⁸⁶ from the port of its own community and bailo since 1319. The objective was to use the city as a commercial hub of the Pontic system, receiving goods by land from Laiazzo and by sea from Tana, and thus avoiding direct navigation from the mouth of the Don to Constantinople, which remained treacherous.

The first consul in Tana, appointed on 28 February 1333, was Niccolò Nanni. But it was with the election of Marco Soranzo, in 1334, that the administration of Tana took on a more structured character. The consul received a salary of 30 gross lire. It was an appreciable salary, which was justified by the need to build the residence and lay the foundations for his business, with the specification that upon completion of the building the salary would drop to 25 lire gross, but ⁸⁷ He was also consul he would have been allowed to "do trade". assigned the sum of one thousand aspers for administrative expenses relating to the Venetians

residents («pro honore nostri et bono mercatorum nostrarum qui erunt ibi»).

He could count on a large following (*familia*) : a notary priest (*presbiter*), an interpreter, ⁸⁹ 4 *famuli*, 4 horses, two criers (*precones*) and two councillors. The choice to assign two councillors to the consul is indicative of the importance attributed to administrative practices. These were elected by and among the nobles residing in Tana immediately after the consul took office from among all those older than 20 ⁹⁰. The social characteristics to access the office of councillor were years. rigid. In the resolution of the senate it is stated that if there were no nobles in the city capable of holding this office, then the consul would operate alone, as did the bailo of Trebizond, also assisted by ⁹¹ The elected received a home for free ("not solving councillors. aliquam pensionm") but they could not refuse the assignment, under penalty of a fine of 300 aspers.

— The councillors' task was to help the consul in managing the Venetian community and therefore resolve disputes, distribute houses for rent to merchants who landed in the port and manage the land to be cultivated.

Having obtained the concession, the Venetian authorities decided to fortify the settlement. The consul asked the Senate for authorization to erect a first defensive structure on a perimeter of 379 steps, but obtained a much smaller extension of no more than 160 steps. ⁹⁴ the land (1.738674) and had a perimeter of 659 meters granted by Uzbek to Venice was just over 1.7 meters just over 278 metres, probably because meters in total, while the fortification granted measured part of the land was

swampy and unbuildable.

In April 1339, as in 1332, the Senate armed ten galleys to go to Romania. Three of these were destined for Tana (and then Trabzon) where they could have remained docked for seven days.

⁹⁵ The extraordinary importance assumed by Tana in these years is confirmed by a document issued by the Grand Council on 4 July 1339 in which it is expressly said that trade in distant lands (Tana and Trebizond are mentioned) is the main activity of Venetian citizens and those who work with them and therefore it is better to protect them ⁹⁶ In fact the galleys of Romania also left the following year, adequately. in the month of July and three were destined for Tana, where they also remained ⁹⁷ The settlement of the Venetian community did not take place for a week. received well disagreements worsened by the Genoese and the historic rivalry was rekindled, this time with its epicenter in Tana. In 1340 the to the point that a group of Ligurian merchants attacked the Venetian neighborhood. very high and the Venetian senate asked the consul too frequent to tolerate. On 5 July 1340 the in Tana to forward a formal protest to the governor of Solgat. The abuse was too much and senate decided to ask the khan for a district further away from the Genoese one and for a reduction of the *commerchium* up to 3% of the value of the goods.

⁹⁸ The tension rose

The brawl involved the highest diplomatic levels. After the complaints forwarded by the Venetian doge to his Genoese counterpart, the authorities of the Ligurian city replaced the consul, accused of the disturbances, and ¹⁰⁰ Simone Boccanegra sent Bartolomeo Gradonico with two letters (dated 24 June and 12 July 1342) in who apologized for the damage caused to the Venetian residents of Tana. ¹⁰¹ In the second he also announced that he had given a mandate to a new consul, Beltramino Merello, so that the two communities could coexist in peace. ¹⁰² In 1342, while the Venetians and Genoese tried to resolve the disputes and their respective diplomacies began negotiations to obtain more favorable conditions, Uzbek died. ¹⁰³ The disappearance of the man who, more than any other, had guaranteed political continuity to the Horde and had always shown openness towards the Western presence generated a climate of uncertainty. Relations between different Latin communities in Crimea and the Azov region became more precarious. He also increased the pace of diplomatic initiatives with the governor of Solgat. ¹⁰⁴

The Golden Horde had reached the height of its power and wealth during Uzbek's long reign. After his death, a period of both political and economic deterioration began. His successor, his son Janibeg (r. 1342-1357), was a fervent Muslim, described by Islamic sources as a tireless supporter of Mohammedan religion and culture. He encouraged the

construction of mosques, attracted scholars from various regions of Islam, but did not appear hostile to the Christian presence, at least at the beginning of his reign. On the other hand, the flourishing mercantile activity of the Westerners, as we have repeatedly underlined, constituted an indispensable resource for the Mongols.¹⁰⁵

In 1342 the ambassadors Giovanni Quirini and Pietro Giustiniani obtained a good agreement from Janibeg, which granted the city new land and allowed its fortification. The khan confirmed the concessions made to Venice by Uzbek in 1332 and authorized the merchants of the Serenissima to live and trade in ¹⁰⁶

Tana, separately from the Genoese. — Janibeg also allowed them to freely administer justice in their neighborhood and to look after the movement of goods at their expense by taking whatever measures they deemed. Thanks to the pact signed with 1940s, the ¹⁰⁷ Janibeg, Tana remained, at the beginning of the years, appropriate. main junction of the northern route, the one that Pegolotti defines as "very safe" for going to China. However, things were changing, and not for the better.

At the beginning of 1343, disturbing news arrived in Venice of events that jeopardized the relationship with the Mongols. Quite a few merchants in Tana evaded the duties owed, or at least tried to, and on 22 July 1343 the Senate expressed its opinion on a report relating to such activities which had most likely been received by the outgoing consul. The resolution states that many merchants defrauded the *commerchium* and the documents show all the concern of the Venetian authorities both at home and *locally* for these illicit behaviors. The Venetian authorities then ordered the consul to require all merchants active in the settlement to swear that they had respected the fiscal obligations established by the agreements. ¹⁰⁸ These behaviors created tensions between the different communities that ¹⁰⁹ lived and worked in Tana.

— Every effort to control individual excesses failed and soon an accident would hit the settlement at the mouth of the Don with unprecedented violence.

- ^{1.} The peace treaty between the two powers was signed in 1310.
- ^{2.} Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne*, p. 162; Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, pp. 67-69.
- ^{3.} Amitai Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 187-201.
- ^{4.} Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, pp. 359-360.
- ^{5.} Ibid., p. 361.
- ^{6.} Faverau, *The Golden Horde and the Mamluks*, p. 104; Ciocîltan gives the date of April 14: Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 175.
- ^{7.} The girl was the daughter of Toqta. Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 176.
- ^{8.} Or in April: ibid., p. 189.
- ^{9.} On the figure of Segurano Salvaygo see Kedar, *Segurano-Sakrÿn Salvaygo*, pp. 75-91 (reprinted in Kedar, *The Franks in the Levant*; Amitai, *Diplomacy and the Slave Trade*, p. 355 and n. 32; Balard, *Le*

transport des esclaves, p. 363; Stello, *Caffa and the Slave*, p. 378; Amitai, *Between the Slave Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 408; Judkevich, *The Nature and Role of the Slave*, pp. 428-431 and 435.

[10.](#) Morgan, *The Decline and Fall of the Mongol Empire*, pp. 430-431.

[11.](#) The Chagadaid Khanate of Central Asia was located geographically between Yüan China and the Ilkhanate and tried for years to establish diplomatic relations with the Mamluks to balance the alliance axis. In 1315 the Chagadaid khan Asen Buqa (r. 1310-1318) received a lavish embassy from Cairo. See on this Biran, *Diplomacy and Chancellery Practices*, p. 376.

[12.](#) For this he sent a contingent to Mecca: Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, p. 363.

[13.](#) Ibid., p. 364. Ysa'ur was the great-grandson of Chagadai Khan.

[14.](#) Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, pp. 188-189.

[15.](#) Kamalov, *Otnošeniia Zolotoj Ordy v Chulaguidami*, p. 75.

[16.](#) Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, pp. 365-367. The port of Laiazzo had become a decisive naval port of call for the entire Anatolian and Middle Eastern commercial system, especially after the conquest of Acre by the Mamluks, as we will see better later. Sinclair, *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean*, p. 25.

[17.](#) Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, pp. 362 and 371.

[18.](#) Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 190.

[19.](#) The agreement shows, among other things, that the times of the universalistic propensity of the Mongols sanctioned they were far from Chinggis Khan's Yasa. Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, p. 368.

[20.](#) Favereau, *The Golden Horde and the Mamluks*, p. 104; Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, 189-190.

[21.](#) Despite the papal prohibitions, Venice maintained relations with the Mamluks, always playing on the thin semantic line of what the papal threats indicated as expressly prohibited (strategic, military and construction material) and what was tacitly permitted. The treaty of 1317 expressly speaks of gifts, cloths and spices, which Sultan Naser Mohammad sent to the doge together with the announcement that he had freed all the Venetians imprisoned in Alexandria (Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol.

II, n. 75, p. 186).

[22.](#) Sinclair, *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean*, pp. 22-23.

[23.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 122-124; Thiriet, *La Romanie Venitienne*, p. 162.

[24.](#) Papal ostracism towards the Mamluks began as a consequence of the Crusades and was aimed at affecting the economic interests of the Egyptian sultanate. The first prohibitions to dock in Alexandria and to entertain any commercial relationship with the sultan's subjects date back at least to the third and fourth councils of Lyon, 1179 and 1215: Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, pp. 242-243; Jacoby, *Western expansion in the Levant*, pp. 225-264.

[25.](#) For example, in 1292 the Senate had prohibited all Venetian merchants from buying and selling slaves *ad terras Soldani*, but in 1302 it recommended that the ambassadors residing in Rome convince the Pope to ease the ban and authorize travel to Alexandria. While he spoke with the Pope, Venetian diplomacy negotiated with the Mamluks; in the same 1302 the city signed a treaty with the sultan which expressly says that Italian merchants can invest the proceeds from the sale of "forbidden" products in the purchase of goods without paying any tax. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol.

I, pp. 5-9; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, pp. 17-44; Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, p. 245 and n. 11; Jacoby, *Overseas Venice in the second thirteenth century*, pp. 263-299.

[26.](#) Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, p. 243.

[27.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative books*, vol. I, n. 169, p. 39. If it is true that military and construction material was expressly prohibited in the papal charters, it is equally true that other goods were not mentioned there, such as fabrics: Ortalli, *Venice and the Papal Bans*, p. 246.

[28.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative books*, vol. I, 216, 47.

[29.](#) The Duke of Candia seized the material causing serious damage to the Genoese merchants, who were then compensated: Giomo, *Libri commemorari*, vol. I, nos. 176 and 187, pp. 40 and 42.

[30.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. I, n. 381, p. 89. On papal policy towards the Mamluks in the 13th century, see Purcell, *Papal Crusading Policy*. On the period covered and on Venice, yes

see Stantchev, *Spiritual Rationality*, pp. 133-144.

[31.](#) «Ad terras soldani scilicet a Damiatina usque ad portellam Armenie»: Giomo, *The rubrics of Mixed Books*, p. 317.

[32.](#) Sinclair, *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean*, pp. 22-26.

[33.](#) Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, p. 374; Amitai-Preiss, *Northern Syria between the Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 146-149.

[34.](#) Amitai, *The Resolution of the Mongol-Mamluk War*, pp. 381-383.

[35.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 173-176.

[36.](#) Monsayt is the ilkhan Abu Said.

[37.](#) It is interesting to note how an official *pactum*, also translated into Venetian, contains Mongolian terms both for tax issues (*tamtaulazo*, *tomaga*) and for much else such as the guards protecting the transit routes in the districts (*tatauli*).

[38.](#) Neither *tamtaulazo* nor *tomaga*. It was a success for Venetian diplomacy given that the document says that previously the Venetians had to pay only to be able to stay in Tabriz and throughout the Ilkhanid territory.

[39.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 174. The fact that it had to be specified suggests that abuse was the norm.

[40.](#) That they cannot be dissuaded from their activity, even if found guilty of serious crimes, up to until they have finished the service for which they were hired by the Venetian merchants.

[41.](#) The article of the treaty, specifically the 19th, is also taken up by Golubovich, *Bio-bibliographic library*, p. 209.

[42.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 176.

[43.](#) Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, pp. 244-245; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, pp. 44-63.

[44.](#) Ortalli, *Venice and Papal Bans*, p. 247.

[45.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative books*, vol. I, n. 319, pp. 75-76.

[46.](#) Son of Oshin I (r. 1307-1320) is sometimes referred to as Leo IV. See Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians*, pp. 208 et seq.

[47.](#) After the Mamluk attack on Laiazzo in 1322, the Armenian patriarch Constantine IV Lampron (1322-1326) was sent on a mission by Sultan Muhammad al-Nasir to negotiate peace conditions. In the resulting treaty the Mamluks formally promised that they would refrain from any hostile acts against the Christian state for the next 15 years. The concession, however, was costly and the Armenian treasury had to grant half of all the revenue derived from the sale of salt to the sultan. Therefore the "duty" mentioned in the document was nothing more than a tax paid by the king of Lesser Armenia to the sultan to guarantee his independence. On the other hand, as we have seen above, the papal bans on trading with the Mamluks had diverted Venetian commercial traffic to the Anatolian port, where both goods and Egyptian buyers flowed, making Laiazzo the "legal" meeting point between a demand and supply that could not directly meet unless violating papal prohibitions. See also Ghazarian, *The Armenian Kingdom*, p. 73.

[48.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 176. The empire of Trebizond needed silver to mint money.

[49.](#) Ibid., p. 180.

[50.](#) Ibid., pp. 178-181.

[51.](#) Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks*, p. 185; Ghazarian, *The Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia*, p. 73.

[52.](#) Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 75; Giomo, *The rubrics of Mixed Books*, pp. 327 et seq.

[53.](#) On which see Pubblici, *Mongol Caucasias*, pp. 144-145 and 164-166.

[54.](#) The pontiff had written to the ilkhan in 1321, counting on the fact that there were emirs converted to Christianity. See Richard, *La Papauté et les missions d'Orient*, p. 175, and n. 159.

[55.](#) Favereau, *The Golden Horde and the Mamluks*, p. 105.

[56.](#) Kamalov, *Otnošenija Zolotoj Ordy*, p. 78.

[57.](#) Ibid., p. 79.

[58.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 192.

[59.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 192-194.

[60.](#) Most likely pushed by the Genoese and their trading partners who, no longer able to keep their rivals out of the Black Sea with diplomacy and war, ostracised them by corrupting local officials. This is why in the treaty of 1320 Abu Sa'id reiterated several times that no one can ask anything from the Venetians outside of the terms set in the agreement and that, on the contrary, everyone must ensure protection for the merchants of the Venetian republic. On this, see Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, pp. 133-134; Petech, *Les marchands italiens*, pp. 568-569.

[61.](#) Petech, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 568; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 192-194; Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, pp. 75-76.

[62.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. I, pp. 256-257; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 192-194.

[63.](#) Giomo, *The rubrics of the Mixed Books*, p. 332.

[64.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 43; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 222-223.

[65.](#) Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 77; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 60, p. 35.

[66.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 138; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 277.

[67.](#) Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 302; Ashtor, *Economic and Social History*, pp. 314-315.

[68.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. I, p. 215.

[69.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 167.

[70.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. I, pp. 214-215; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 164-166.

[71.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 164-165.

[72.](#) Renewed in 1332. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 230-234.

[73.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 200-203; Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, p. 160-161.

[74.](#) Berindei, Migliardi O'Riordan, *Venise et la Horde d'Or*, pp. 246-247.

[75.](#) Giomo, *The rubrics of the Mixed Books*, p. 328.

[76.](#) State Archives of Venice (henceforth ASV), Senato Misti (henceforth SM), VII, f. 66r and 86r, VIII, f. 62r; Stöckly, *The system of enchantment*, p. 106; Karpov, *Drevnejšie postanovlenija*, p. 17, doc. of 22 September 1322.

[77.](#) Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, pp. 193-194 and especially Hautala, *V zemljach "severnoj Tartarii"*, pp. 37-39 and Vasilievskij, *Trudy*, vol. I, pp. CXCIII-CXIV. The sources indicate as a pretext for the attack the sound emitted by the bells of Christian churches, which offended the Muslim faithful. In 1318 Pope John XXII had written to Uzbek recommending him to welcome Christians into his kingdom and to allow them to carry out missionary activity. On 23 September 1323 the pontiff wrote again to the Khan of the Horde complaining that Uzbek had driven the Christians out of Soldaia, that all the bells had been removed from the churches and that these had been converted into mosques.

[78.](#) Evidently the Mongol raids had the desired effect since when Ibn Battuta arrived in Soldaia, in the spring of 1334, he noted that the city was populated mainly by Turks: *The Travels of Ibn Battûta*, pp. 471-472. See also Hautala, *Comparing Eastern and Missionary Sources*, p. 39; Vasilievsky, *Trudy*, vol. I, p. CXCIV.

[79.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 158, which proved that the city of Crimea disappears from Genoese documentation up to the middle of the century.

[80.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 243-244; Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 751; Tafel, Thomas, *Urkunden*, pp. 243 et seq. Ibn Battuta also left us a vivid description of the Tana at the time of Uzbek in his *Rihla*; the traveler arrived in the city on the Don in the spring of 1332 together with a Mongolian emir and was able to visit it, noting its extraordinary liveliness and the diversity of the people who lived there.

[81.](#) «Domos hedificarent as well as faciendum mercatones suas», *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 244.

[82.](#) «Aplicantesque navessuas in Tanam, in quibuscunque civitatibus contingat eos facere mercatones»: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 244; Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 752.

[83.](#) In the document there is probably confirmation that the Venetians frequented Tana in the past since Uzbek allows them not to pay any duties on the precious *ab antiquo*: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 243; Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24: «Gold and silver and pearls pay neither trade nor tamuga nor any right to the Tana». These were objects highly prized by the Mongols who always tried to encourage trade in them.

[84.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 19, p. 26.

[85.](#) *L'Armeno-Veneto*, pp. 38-39, doc. n. 14. A similar privilege had been granted by Leo V to Venice after the embassy of Michele Giustiniani commissioned by the Doge Giovanni Soranzo (Canestrini, *Documentispettanti al Commercio*, pp. 41-44). Shortly before, Pantaleone Michiel, Venetian ambassador, had obtained a similar privilege with Trebizond, Canestrini, *Documentispettivi al Commercio*, pp. 44-48.

[86.](#) ASV, SM, XV, f. 67r of 15 March 1333; Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 73.

[87.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 249-250 (the date of the act is 9 February 1334).

[88.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 250.

[89.](#) ASV, SM, XV, f. 57; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 249; Karpov, *Venetianskaya Tana po aktam kanclera Benedetto B'janko*, p. 10.

[90.](#) ASV, SM, XXV, ff. 9v and 10 of 6 April 1349. See also Karpov, *Enforced councilor*, p. 266.

[91.](#) «Si vero in Tana non essent nobiles qui possent esse consiliarii, tunc consul per se solum exequatur et facia regime suum et sibi commissa, ut facit baiulus Tapessonde»: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 250.

[92.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 250. Since all the nobles resident in Tana, with rare exceptions, were merchants, the task of assisting the consul in his functions could be burdensome and distract the elected representatives from their activity in a region that the Venetian authorities themselves considered very dangerous.

[93.](#) ASV, SM, XV, f. 57v and 58r; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 251. Both the date reported by Thiriet (1333) and that by Thomas (1334) are incorrect. See Karpov, *On the Origin of Medieval Tana*, p. 235, n. 64.

[94.](#) See Martini, *Manual of metrology*, p. 817.

[95.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 91, p. 41.

[96.](#) Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées Vénitiennes*, vol. I, pp. 193 and 308-309.

[97.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 105, p. 43.

[98.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 755.

[99.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 111, p. 44.

[100.](#) Canale, *Della Crimea*, pp. 449 et seq.

[101.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 259-261.

[102.](#) «Quod nedum de cetero fraternitas et cara unitas inter vestrates augeatur et preterita enormia puniantur et corrigantur per eum, sed amici gaudia gaudijs cumulent et inimici vestri et nostri ad dolendum tristissime provocentur»: *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 260.

[103.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 138, p. 49. The document is dated 16 March 1342 e not 1341 as erroneously written by Thiriet (ASV, SM, XX, f. 41).

[104.](#) To avoid clashes with the Genoese, on 17 March 1343 the Venetian Senate asked the consul of Tana to accept the land (*teradego*) offered by the Mongols. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 151, p. 51.

[105.](#) The *commerchium* varied, as we have seen, from 3% to 5% based on the goods and the agreements signed with the khans of the Horde. Pegolotti states that the Venetians and Genoese are the only ones who pay 4% on goods such as wine, sturgeon, leather and leapfrog, while for all other merchants the levy was 5%. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, pp. 24-25.

[106.](#) «Cum eorum mercatonibus possint stare et habitare secure in dicta terra Tane, separam a lanuensis Franchis»: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 261-263, in particular p. 262.

[107.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 261-263.

[108.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 157.

[109.](#) Following new tensions, on 12 July 1343 the Genoese doge wrote to Venice assuring that he had instructed Beltramino Morello to punish the excesses committed by his fellow citizens against the Venetians,

asking him to do the same: G iomo , *Memorial books* , I want it. II, p. 1 0 3.

5. Venice and the Mongols: the years of crisis (1343-1360)

1. *The crisis of 1343: origins and consequences*

In a settlement built specifically for commercial purposes like Tana, merchants of local origin were far from a minority. Many of them had regular relationships with the Italians with whom they shared warehouses, shops and taverns. They stipulated various types of contracts with them; sometimes they appear as partners in *companies*. They were active in the buying and selling of slaves and brought luxury goods to Tana which the Venetian merchants - who could rarely procure them directly - bought and then resold locally or transported back to their homeland. It is in this climate of daily interaction that the most violent clash ever occurred between the Mongols and the Westerners residing in the empire. It was an event which, triggered in Tana at the end of the summer of 1343 and then rapidly spread to Caffa and the Black Sea, involved all the Venetian and Genoese settlements, and had immediate consequences on the system of Latin-Mongolian relations.

At the beginning of 1343 life in Tana was apparently peaceful, and the new Jochid khan Janibeg had visited the settlement a few months earlier, welcomed with full honors by the consul Philip Michiel. things changed due to an accident as ¹ But since the end of summer sudden as it was violent.

In September a fight broke out between a Venetian citizen and a

Mongolian merchant. There is a copious bibliography on the event and its causes. ²

Some sources speak of the event in great detail, but in a contradictory way. The most detailed contemporary account is that of the Swiss Franciscan John of Winterthur (d. ca. 1348), according to which a rich and powerful Muslim (*pagan*) merchant struck a Venetian nobleman with his fist or a whip (*fist vel scourge*).

³ The causes of the gesture are not specified, however the members of the Venetian Senate had no doubts that

the fault was "an insidious homo inside the world, who had done badly". The ⁴ The man in question was Andreolo Civran, a Venetian merchant living in Tana, who took revenge for the insult he had suffered. Having gathered a group of compatriots, they went to the attacker's house and killed him together with his entire family.

A more synthetic version of the facts is that provided by the *Chronicon* of Lorenzo De Monacis (1351-1428), written around 1420. Diplomat, humanist and well-informed person, De Monacis only says that the Venetian Civran (*de Civrana prole*) reacted to one slap killing a Mongol with a sword, "for the evil that this homo [the Civran] had done, the emperor Zanibech yes corozà". ⁶ In fact ^{5e} the Mongols became furious and demanded that Civran be handed over to them. At that point a multitude of Tartars attacked the Latin quarters in Tana, forcing the Venetians and Genoese to flee by sea.

⁷ The version of the Venetian chronicler Antonio Morosini (ca1368-ca1433) is also rather dry but all in all in line with both that of Winterthur and that of De Monacis. According to Morosini, a Venetian nobleman, whose name the author does not provide, reacted to the insult received from a rich Mongolian, confirming that a group of Venetians entered the attacker's house and killed him and his family. Morosini confirms that the Mongols' reaction was immediate and violent to the point that all the Latins, regardless of nationality, had to leave Tana hastily by sea. Few, however, succeeded, and those who remained suffered Mongol retaliation.

Historiography has dealt with the incident since the 19th century. According to the [Venetian](#) made by Canale, later taken up by Heyd, Andreolo Civran killed the Mongol ^{reconstruction} Khodja Omar during a fight. ⁹

Omar was not a commoner, but a Mongolian tax official, a *beg*.

We have repeatedly underlined how the privileges that the Mongol khans granted to Venice and Genoa were intended as imperial concessions. The cornerstone of each agreement was a clear definition of the respective jurisdictions, according to which if a subject of the khan was the victim of a crime, or was otherwise involved in criminal acts, the case fell under Mongol jurisdiction. But Civran escaped the khan's justice, and the Venetian representatives, perhaps out of a sense of solidarity or because Civran enjoyed cover, did not hand him over to the local authorities. Having managed to return to his homeland, he was later tried and convicted, but the punishment was decidedly mild: he was banished from Venice for five years and banned for life from all markets subject to Mongolian authority.

¹⁰

If Civran emerged unscathed, the consequences of his actions were enormous, and forced Genoa and Venice to redefine their respective strategies and alliances in [the](#) Levant.

— The immediate material damage caused by clashes among the population

local and the Latins were huge. ¹² Many European residents lost their lives, others lost property, goods, and everything they had invested. Many were robbed in their homes or while fleeing. There were merchants who, to avoid bankruptcy, transgressed the Pope's ban and brought their goods to the ports controlled by the Mamluks. When the perpetrators of the violation then found themselves having to justify themselves to the Venetian authorities, they proved tolerant, and reduced or forgave the sanctions due, recognizing ¹³ the exceptional nature of the crisis.

Janibeg's reaction followed that of the local population, and the siege of Tana was added to the attacks on Venetian properties, which soon forced all the Westerners to flee, finding shelter in Caffa, a well-fortified city that was difficult to conquer. The position of Caffa itself made the siege difficult, as it opened onto the sea, which provided both an escape route and the possibility of bringing in supplies and reinforcements. However, an important fact is that the Genoese authorities agreed to welcome the Venetian citizens to Caffa, demonstrating solidarity in the face of a common threat. There were ¹⁴ different factors behind Janibeg's reaction. The oldest studies emphasized the khan's anger. This is a reason that should not be overlooked because, have said, the murder of a Mongolian aristocrat could not go unpunished. To this it must ~~as we~~ be added that the behavior of the Genoese of Caffa was now openly independent and as such constituted a threat. For years, Ligurian merchants considered the city of Crimea not a concession, but an extension of the motherland, and as such autonomous. As had already happened in the past, the time had come for Janibeg to reaffirm its authority. ¹⁵ News of the clashes spread quickly and soon reached Italy. On 25 October 1343 the Venetian Senate elected five *wise men* to carefully examine the facts and evaluate the damage suffered by their community. On 10 November a warrant was issued for the arrest

of those responsible for the violence, probably Civran's accomplices, identified as six people ("illos qui sibi viderentur culpabiles de homicide vel homicidiis perpetratis in Tana terra") for ¹⁶ At the same time the i whom interrogation by torture was ordered. Senate sent two ambassadors from Janibeg: Nicoletto di Raynerio and Zanachi Barbafella, to "fix" things.

¹⁷ However, the initiative was not successful and the Tana street remained closed.

In the aftermath of the Mongol attack, those who could had reached Caffa, under Genoese protection, or Constantinople, where they had found protection in the Venetian neighbourhood. But not everyone managed to escape. This required the evacuation of the fellow citizens still remaining in Tana and, if

possible, to the recovery of lost assets. There was also another problem: in the chaos of the clashes several Venetians were guilty of acts of looting and robbery.

It is therefore not surprising that the Venetian authorities, having learned of the incident, ordered those responsible to return the stolen goods within a maximum period of eight days from any complaints that had been received. For the occasion the judiciary of the *Extraordinarii*, created in 1302 in order to collect the rentals of the municipal galleys, was responsible for collecting data on the thefts against the ¹⁸ The primary objective of the Venetian authorities was to quickly heal the rupture with Janibeg and resume "foreign" residents of Tana. navigation towards the Black Sea.

However, as we mentioned above, things took a different turn and, after having expelled the "Franks" from Tana, the khan also attacked Caffa. The Mongol siege was frustrated by the Genoese resistance: in February 1344 the inhabitants of the city came out of the walls in an assault that broke the siege, to the point that the Mongol army had to retreat, even if Janibeg did not abandon the idea of conquering the Genoese colony. For their part, having escaped the danger of the fall of Caffa, Genoa and Venice undertook diplomatic paths in two directions: towards the Mongol court and between themselves. Between January and February 1344 the Senate of Venice carefully evaluated the serious news arriving from Tana. It was decided to send another embassy to the khan and to prohibit Venetian merchants from trading in the Golden Horde, under penalty of a fine of 500 grosses plus half the value of the goods transported. The Venetian authorities instructed the Bailiff of Constantinople to ensure that the measures taken were fully implemented.

¹⁹

During the clashes in Tana the Mongols had arrested an unknown number of Venetian merchants, who according to Giovanni Villani's chronicle were sixty.

²⁰

In a subsequent session, held on 12 March 1344, the Senate authorized the ambassadors to request, among other things, the liberation of the Venetians whom "the emperor of the Tartars holds amidst torments and privations", and the Before authorizing further initiatives, the Senate recovery of assets. wait ²¹ wanted

for more precise news, presumably brought by a merchant expected in Venice shortly thereafter and by the crew of a Genoese galley arriving from Caffa. ²² The Venetian embassies organized in February 1344 obtained ²³ In permission to leave in the spring, and on 10 May two galleys were armed. June of same year the senate established the terms of the negotiation which was to be conducted with ~~the~~ the khan in person and *more usually*.

²⁴

Meanwhile, consultations with Genoa continued. On 18 June 1344 the Genoese ambassador Corrado Cigala arrived in Venice and proposed to the doge to

join forces (*unio sive composito*) to organize a joint diplomatic action and put pressure on Janibeg to release all prisoners,

compensated the damages and allowed the merchants of the two cities to return to Gazaria.

[25](#)

The strategy was ambitious: in the treaty the authorities of the two republics agreed to refuse any agreement if Janibeg attacked Caffa again. To put pressure on the khan they decided to resort to the instrument of an embargo on all the Horde markets, but it was a decision that would have generated friction because, as we said above, for Genoa "the Horde markets" did not include Caffa, for Venice yes. [26](#) At first the Genoese proposal was welcomed by Venice and the two cities signed an agreement, ratified on 1 July.

[27](#) The treaty speaks openly

of many victims, Genoese and Venetian, caused by the clashes in Tana. Diplomatic delegations were organized to be sent to Crimea and, if possible, directly from Janibeg. Venice sent two ambassadors, Marco Ruzzini and Giovanni Steno, who were to meet their Genoese counterparts appointed by Corrado Cigala, plenipotentiary of the Doge Simon Boccanegra, in Caffa, and then go together to the khan. [28](#) The delegation was tasked with conducting joint negotiations, and in the union treaty they were advised not to negotiate separately unless strictly necessary.

The envoys were also ordered to ask Janibeg for the release of their fellow citizens, and to establish ways for the return of the seized goods. They would also have to stipulate a treaty of friendship with the khan offering him compensation for damages. [29](#) If the attempt at peace with Janibeg had failed, Genoa and Venice would have undertaken to break off all commercial relations with the Golden Horde for a year starting from 1 July 1344. Breaking the ban would have entailed a fine of ten thousand ducats for transgressors.

But the issues of a union entirely unbalanced towards Genoa soon came to light. Having landed in Caffa at the end of August 1344, Ruzzini and Steno communicated to the senate that, despite the agreements not to trade in Gazaria, the Genoese were regularly loading in the port of Caffa because, in fact, they did not consider the city subject to Mongol authority .

[30](#) This aspect will

remain controversial. For Venice, *Gazaria* included all the territory subjected to the khan's authority, while Genoa did not agree and believed that Caffa, as an extension of the motherland and therefore Genoese in all respects, should be excluded from the naval blockade.

On 20 November 1344, the Senate sent Niccolò di Freganesco on a diplomatic mission to Genoa to investigate the issue, learned from the ambassadors,

relating to the use of the port of Caffa, which allegedly violated the ban on trade with the Golden Horde. The Genoese doge replied that it was not a violation of the agreements since Caffa could not be considered a territory subject to the authority of Janibeg, especially since if Genoa had agreed to close Caffa to commercial traffic, the inhabitants would not have had the resources to resist to the siege,

and this would have harmed the two cities more than the Mongols. [31](#)

Venice probably bit the bullet. In a situation of extreme danger like the one that had arisen, it was more convenient to accept the conditions proposed by the rival and make common cause so as not to risk losing Caffa, which the Venetians themselves used while awaiting a hoped-for return to [32](#) Tana. .

— In any case, the Venetian ambassadors obtained agreements that somehow rebalanced the union, allowing the merchants to enjoy the same conditions in Caffa as the Genoese. Furthermore, if it is true that the commercial embargo decided by mutual agreement was blocking the economic activity of both, it is equally true that the economy of the entire region suffered the greatest damage, to the point that it was the local merchants who complained about it , as shown by the report of the Venetian ambassadors who were in Caffa. [33](#)

Despite joint diplomatic efforts, which lasted until early 1345, the two cities achieved nothing from Janibeg. In order to increase the pressure on the Mongols, on July 1 the conditions of the union were redefined, [34](#) This time which would last until the end of the following month of March terms seemed more favorable for Venice, given that Genoa agreed to exempt it [1346](#). The from payment of trade duties and allowed them to frequent,

in addition to Caffa, the neighborhood of Pera, with the bilateral commitment to boycott Tana. [35](#) In reality, these advantages were only apparent if we consider that the agreement, stipulated in late summer, would only come into force in autumn, when navigation of the Black Sea was practically at a standstill. [36](#)

Among the conditions of the alliance there was also a commitment, on the part of both, not to enter into agreements with Janibeg nor with any of his subjects and [37](#) successors.

— Genoa and Venice agreed not to sail either with their own ships or on other people's ships east and north of Caffa. On this point the document is peremptory: it was possible to go to Constantinople and Pera with armed and non-armed ships, but it was absolutely forbidden for merchants from both cities to go armed, or to remain within the borders of the Golden Horde ("for aliquas terras prohibited. ^{vel} — loca dicti imperatoris Ianibech») as long as the union remained in force. Navigation to Tana with or without goods was Naturally, even in this case, Caffa was excluded from the ban. [39](#)

— Genoa undertook to guarantee access to Caffa to all Venetian merchants with their goods and all ships

they could cover the marine area between Caffa and Pera ("except ad locum et civitatem Caffa, et ab inde infra versus occidentem sive versus Peyram").⁴⁰ The Venetians

thus had the right to use the port of Caffa to evacuate the goods they had brought from Tana. Even more important was the concession that Genoa made to its rival regarding the consul: the Venetian officer could settle in Caffa and assume legal responsibility for the Venetian community as long as the league with Genoa remained in force.

⁴¹ It was up to two *good men*, one Venetian and one Genoese, to establish how much the Venetians had to pay for the rent of the houses and warehouses granted to them by the authorities. However, since "human nature is irremediably malignant", it was necessary to carefully establish⁴² the clauses in case of infringement of even a single rule contained in the treaty. Anyone who had sailed east or to Tana would have had to pay a very high fine: ten thousand gold ducats, plus the damages caused by any Mongol retaliation and, finally, a variable sum for each infringement of the other points of the treaty. As mentioned, the agreement would remain in force for a year but could not serve as a legal basis for future litigation.

⁴³

Meanwhile on the Black Sea, despite the league with Genoa and the activity of the ambassadors who had once again gone to Tana, the situation did not change.

On November 13, 1345, after having examined the letters *ambaxatorum nostrarum Tane* and consulted three *wise men*, the Senate concluded that there was no hope of reaching a peace agreement and ordered its envoys to return by the deadline of the union, i.e. 1st April 1346.

⁴⁴ And in fact in the winter of 1345-1346

Janibeg - who still believed he could prevail over Caffa's resistance - attempted a new assault on the city walls. This attempt also failed, but it had consequences that affected an entire continent.

The siege had been carefully prepared by Janibeg, who had prepared a fleet and also organized an attack from the sea. The Genoese navy, however, defeated the Mongol navy without too much effort, and in the counteroffensive of the first months of 1346 the Ligurian galleys occupied the port of ⁴⁵ In the meantime, the Mongol army found itself facing Cembalo (Balaklava). detailed source on the ~~a~~ much more dangerous enemy than the Franks: the plague. The most siege of Caffa in 1345-1346 is the chronicle of the Piacenza notary Gabriele de Mussi (or de' Mussis), which provides many details on the epidemic among the ranks of the besiegers. ⁴⁶ The plague that struck Europe starting in 1348 was already endemic in

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⁴⁷ In 1345 it struck the cities of the Golden Horde, in particular Sarai and Astrakhan. Between the spring and summer of 1346 the contagion spread throughout the area

Volga region, and at the beginning of 1347 the first outbreaks developed in the Caucasus to reach, in the spring of 1347, Tana and Caffa. ⁴⁸ According to de Mussi's story, which did not reach us in the original, but rather in a copy dating back to the end of the 14th century, during the siege of Caffa the Mongols used catapults to throw the corpses of plague victims into the walls, and in this way to infect the besieged. ⁴⁹ Although we do not have confirmation from documentary sources, there is no doubt that the presence of the epidemic in Crimea had a decisive role in the transmission of the plague to Europe. ⁵⁰

The reconstruction of the Piacenza chronicler has enormously influenced the historiographical debate on the origins of the disease in Europe. As he was linked to Genoese and Venetian affairs in the East, de Mussi was likely informed of the events by direct witnesses. Although some elements appear exaggerated, in general the source is considered reliable, and there is little doubt that, although the Mongols and their siege technique cannot in itself be held responsible, the plague arrived in Western Europe on Genoese ships coming from the Black Sea.

⁵¹ But he did not arrive there as a consequence of the siege of Caffa in 1346, but rather in the following years, on board ships transporting grain. In the warehouses of the warehouses in Tana, in Caffa and in all the cities of the region, large quantities of grain and cereals had accumulated, and given the normal "cohabitation" of grain and rats, in all probability at the end of the war between the Italians and Janibeg, when navigation reopened, rats carrying fleas infected with the plague bacillus (main vectors of transmission to humans) were embarked together with the grain. On the contrary, in Russia it was the parasites of fur-bearing animals, such as marmots, that spread the plague, with similar mechanisms although linked to a different trade. ⁵² —

The most recent studies seem to confirm the theory advanced half a century ago by Ruggero Romano, according to which the epidemic was directly linked to the famines that had struck at a local level almost everywhere. ⁵³ For example, from 1341 to 1347 the Byzantine civil war had reached its peak, causing ⁵⁴ enormous damage to agricultural production and shortages of cereals throughout western Pontus. ⁵⁵

Therefore, excluding bacteriological warfare and accepting the more realistic theory of fleas as a vector of contagion, the fact remains that the demographic consequences of the plague were catastrophic, not only in Europe but throughout the entire Black Sea basin and Asia. Among the many testimonies of the time, it is enough to remember the words contained in the Sienese chronicle attributed to Agnolo di Tura and those of the Florentine chronicler Matteo Villani. We know very little about the Sienese, but he himself claims to have buried five children due to the pandemic.

a passage from the *Sienese Chronicle* writes that the Genoese galleys «returned from overseas [...] with much infirmity and corruption of air which was overseas. [...] And so when you reached Gienova the very serious disease actually attacked you and many people died . "

Giovanni, who also died of the plague in 1348, writes that

began in the parts of the East, in the said year [1346], towards Cattai and upper India, and in the other provinces surrounding the marine ones of the Ocean, a plague among men of every condition, of every age and sex , who began to spit blood and died, some immediately, some in two or three days. [...] And in the last of this time it was added to the nations of the Mare Maggiore, and to the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea, in Syria and Turkey, and towards Egypt and the coast of the Red Sea, and from the northern part Rossia and Greece, and Erminia and the other consequent provinces.

[57](#)

In April 1346, however, with the Mongol army still under the walls of Caffa, Venice confirmed the decision taken months earlier and ordered its diplomats to return, unless "new glimmers of opportunity open up", perhaps with the help of the Genoese ambassadors.

[58](#)

2. *Peace with Janibeg*

The plague was undoubtedly a factor of crisis in Europe and Asia in the 14th century, but it hit the Christian West with particular vehemence, as it was part of an already critical economic context.

[59](#)

Harvests in Italy in

the mid-decade had been poor, prompting Venetian authorities to import grain from the ulus jochide, despite the embargo established by Treaty [60](#) with Genoa in 1345.

On the political side, the situation in the Black Sea basin was deteriorating in the mid-14th century. As we saw in the previous chapter, since 1338 Venice had decided to abandon the markets of the Ilkhanate because the Chobanids, who had taken power in Tabriz, did not guarantee adequate control over the territory. Shortly after the decision of the Venetian authorities, Genoa also prohibited its merchants from trading twice, in 1340 and 1342. On the second occasion, the Chobanid leader Malik travel to Persia. Ashraf (d. 1357) renewed the offer of a warehouse in Tabriz made to the Genoese by his predecessor Hasan Kuçek. The Ligurian authorities accepted but already the first Genoese caravan heading to Tabriz was attacked and robbed by raiders.

[62](#)

Furthermore, the political climate in Asia Minor was not improving. Byzantium and Trebizond were engaged in constant conflicts. From 1321 to 1354 the fragile Byzantine empire of the Palaiologos was torn apart by a civil war that seemed

had no end. ⁶³ Trebizond was besieged by the Ottomans in 1341 and 1348. ⁶⁴

In the second siege the Venetian neighborhood was seriously damaged by fire. Between 1348 and the following year Genoa and the empire of Trebizond faced each other in a war in which the Ligurians prevailed, destroying the rich city of Kerasous.

⁶⁵

Both the events of 1343 and the Mamluk conquest of Laiazzo in 1337 forced Western merchants to resume investments in Alexandria since there was no other way to reach Persia. Venice, given the stalemate in the negotiations with Janibeg and the dangerous alliance with Genoa, which placed it in a highly vulnerable condition, decided to take precautions by reopening the commercial channels in the Levant. To this end he officially asked Pope Clement VI (r. 1342-1352) to suspend the ban on trading with the ⁶⁶ On the Persian front, in 1344 the Mamelukes, obtaining a positive response. Venetian bailo of Constantinople Marco Foscarini made contact with the authorities of Tabriz, but the initiative brought no results.

If the colonies of Caffa and Tana had developed as an alternative to other routes, the war with Janibeg threatened the commercial bases on which the largest part of trade and investments had been concentrated, damaging everyone, but above all Venice, which could not recover possession of Tana. After the union with Genoa expired (April 1346) the Venetian authorities decided to try the diplomatic path with Janibeg again, but independently. The sources are silent on the final months of 1346, but we know that the situation was still very fluid as the galleys put up for auction in September could only cross the straits after having carefully assessed the situation.

⁶⁷

Diplomatic relations with the Jochids re-emerge from the documentation in the spring of 1347, when Genoa and Venice signed a separate peace with Janibeg, who was also unable to continue in a war that had also seriously damaged the Mongolian economy. Evidently the meeting between the representatives of Venice and Janibeg was successful, because on 16 May 1347 a merchant from Candia was able to communicate that the ⁶⁸ For its part, Genoa mobilized peace and trade with Tana had resumed. immediately so as not to be left out, putting an end to the embargo and also allowing it to return to the Mongolian ports from June 1347.

⁶⁹

In the peace negotiations Venice asked Janibeg to renew the concessions it had enjoyed before the crisis. On 19 June 1347 the senate sent two ambassadors to the khan, Giovanni Quirini and Zulfredo Morosini, to whom the initiative was taken

added a third appointed by the bailiff of Constantinople. and on December ⁷⁰

success, ⁷¹ 26 of the same year Janibeg signed a pact in which he

established that the Venetians were granted an area separate from the neighborhood ⁷² The ships of the ~~kh~~ khan granted the *paiza*, or imperial pass, to all Genoese. those who traveled on the Serenissima. The jurisdiction of the Venetian consul in Tana was also confirmed, but only within the Venetian neighborhood and over the Latin residents. Anyone who had committed "outrage" or violence against Mongols or Saracens would have been arrested and handed over to the khan's justice.

The land granted to the Venetians, delivered by the Mongol ruler of Tana, was modest in size but more than sufficient to install a warehouse.

It measured approximately one hundred and seventy meters long and one hundred and twenty meters wide (just over two hectares in surface area) and extended to "the river bank". ⁷³ The — fiscal terms were also carefully established in the agreement, according to which Venetian merchants would pay 3% on all transactions while everyone else had to pay 5%.

⁷⁴ Gold and silver were exempt from taxation.

Everything weighed in cantari was taxed 5% and had to be weighed ⁷⁵ Salary upon entry and exit of the Venetian consul's officers. of the consul was set at 70 lire gross, against the ~~at~~ the hands 60 he received before the crisis of 1343, probably as compensation for the risks that the position entailed, even if in a short time (in 1348) it was reduced to 40 lire and he was granted permission to do business. ⁷⁶ The consul could also demand 1% on commercial transactions from all Venetian merchants or from those who worked with them to fit within the budget allocated by the senate. With the proceeds the consul had to cover all the expenses for the administration of the city, and if the funds were not enough he would have to advance the difference from his own pocket, reserving the right to request reimbursement at home.

77

3. *The Venetian-Genoese war*

The return of the Venetians to Tana worried Genoa, which perhaps had hoped to be able to eliminate its rival, or make it completely subordinate, during the war with Janibeg. As we have already underlined, the war had not been a good deal for anyone, but of all the actors involved in the conflict, Genoa was the one that had lost the least. On the contrary, Caffa emerged strengthened, as it had not been affected by the embargo on Gazaria which had instead weakened Tana.

Furthermore, Genoa owned an entire sector of the city of Constantinople – Pera/Galata – and had expanded its reach into the Aegean. While the Genoese and Venetians were resisting the Mongol siege together,

barricaded inside the walls of Caffa, the fleets of the two cities competed for their respective spheres of influence in the Aegean. The Genoese squads managed to conquer Chios on 15 June and Phocaea on 20 September 1346, alarming both the Byzantine emperor John VI Kantakouzenos and Venice. The growing political weight that Genoa had acquired throughout the eastern Mediterranean had been opposed by every means by Venice but now, after having resisted the Mongol sieges together and having both suffered the devastating consequences of the pandemic, the political and economic balance between the two powers was again in question.

Furthermore, when Genoa welcomed the Venetians in Caffa, an ambiguous situation was created, which exposed the Venetian residents to various abuses, causing a litany of complaints.⁷⁸ The return of Venice to Tana did not undermine Caffa's supremacy in the Black Sea, but it rekindled the competition. On September 1, 1347, the Senate of Venice rejected the Genoese request to "share" the port of Caffa on the condition of abandoning Tana.

— Tensions between the two communities in Tana worsened in the years 1348-1349 in an international context aggravated by the crisis between Byzantium and Genoa. The conquest of Chios and Phocaea by the Ligurian fleet captained by Simone Vignoso had been a severe blow to Venetian influence in the Aegean and a humiliation for the emperor John Kantakouzenos. At the end of the decade, diplomatic relations reached a stalemate and conflict became inevitable. The rivalry, dormant but not resolved during the resistance against the Mongols, was exacerbated after the peace with Janibeg due to the firm Genoese desire to maintain its position of dominance threatened by the resumption of Venetian trade in Tana. Thus a situation was created in which on the one hand there was growing Genoese aggression in the Aegean and the Black Sea, on the other a rapprochement between Byzantium and Venice, which tried to contain it.

Before the conflict exploded, diplomatic activity was frenetic although ineffective. On 19 May 1348 the Venetian Senate ordered Giustiniano Giustiniani, captain of the galleys of Romània, to take his convoy to shelter.

⁸⁰ The galleys put up for auction in December 1348 were sold for an average of 49 lire compared to 80 for those in Cyprus, a sign that the situation beyond the Straits was worsening. Black Sea they were forbidden to cross.⁸² In the summer put up for auction to go to Romània- of 1350 tensions between the Genoese and Venetians on the Straits.

— Black reached their climax. On 18 July Doge Andrea Dandolo decided to send an embassy to Genoa to protest. Marin Faliero was chosen, who was given the mandate to demand complete satisfaction for the oppression suffered by the

the Venetians and to defend the rights of the Republic at Tana. the continuous ⁸³ The Senate complained to Genoese harassment at Caffa and Tana and the attempt to block the entry of Venetian ships to the mouth of the Don. Faliero also had to demand that the Genoese abuses against the Venetians in Constantinople cease.

⁸⁴ We have no details on the outcome of the embassy, but the development of events shows that the diplomatic initiative failed. Venice prepared for war and on 28 August 1350 the Senate ordered the consul of Tana to warn all the merchants who were still in Caffa to seek refuge in the ports under ⁸⁵ The conflict involved not only the Byzantine Empire and the the Venetian authority. Ottomans, but also the Catalans, the crown of Aragon and, albeit indirectly, all interested in carving out an autonomous space in the Kingdom of Hungary, ⁸⁶ Eastern Mediterranean.

The Venetian-Genoese war lasted five years and had alternating phases. Venice, severely affected by the plague, had to resort to compulsory conscription to equip and arm 35 galleys under the orders of Captain Marco Ruzzini. The first real clash between the two fleets occurred in front of Negroponte.

The Venetian galleys attacked 14 Genoese galleys loaded with goods and seized them. Genoa counterattacked shortly thereafter: a fleet reached the Aegean island and sacked it. On that occasion the Venetian fleet, taken by surprise, was unable to oppose. The Venetian authorities understood that they could not win the war and considered the opportunity of finding an alliance with the crown of Aragon. The Catalan-Aragonese seemed ideal allies because they had always been at war against Genoa for control of Sardinia. Thus, on January 16, 1351, the two powers signed a formal agreement. A few months later, in May, the Byzantine emperor John Kantakouzenos also joined the alliance and pledged to provide 12 galleys to the league's fleet. Defeated at sea, Genoa would have been forced to negotiate. The objectives of the anti-Genoese alliance were the return of the island of Chios and the neighborhood of Pera to Byzantium, and above all the reduction of the Ligurian presence in the Black Sea.

⁸⁷

The war dragged on for months with skirmishes and low-intensity clashes, until the league fleet arrived before Constantinople in February 1352, eagerly awaited by the Byzantine emperor. The Battle of the Bosphorus ⁸⁸ Per

it was fought between 13 and 14 February and ended in a terrible massacre. as in a letter — to the king of Aragon Peter VI the Venetian doge Andrea ⁸⁹ the clash did not have a real Dandolo league, victor, but only huge losses in human lives and celebrates the "great success" of the vessels for both sides, to the point that the Venetian-Catalan-Aragonese fleet was forced to retreat, leaving Kantakouzenos alone to face the Genoese retaliation.

The emperor had no choice but to surrender, with direct repercussions on Venetian strategy in the Black Sea. On 6 May 1352, Genoese and Byzantine diplomacy signed a peace treaty which put an end to Byzantium's participation in the league. Genoa regained full control of Pera and demanded that all the privileges established almost a century earlier in Ninfio be confirmed en bloc. Furthermore, it inflicted further humiliation on the fragile emperor by forcing him to ask permission from Genoa to send the Byzantine ships ⁹⁰ to Tana.

In the central and final months of 1352 the war moved to the Aegean, but it remained a conflict of skirmishes and looting. Having defeated the Byzantines and scaled down the league's ambitions, Genoa concluded an alliance with the Angevins of Hungary, who were also interested in expanding into Venetian Dalmatia. The final act of the conflict took place in 1353 in Portolungo, near Modone, in the Peloponnese, where the Genoese admiral Paganino Doria inflicted a heavy defeat on Niccolò Pisani's Venetian galleys. It seemed like a triumph for Genoa, but just as the fate of the conflict seemed to be turning in favor of the Ligurian republic, Venetian diplomacy managed to bring its rival to the peace table. This was not the result of a clever diplomatic maneuver, but the outcome of a factual situation. All the participants in the conflict were exhausted and had lost too many resources in a war that no longer seemed to benefit anyone. Furthermore, Genoa, seriously in debt, had entrusted itself to the Milanese lordship of Giovanni Visconti (d. 1354), who had no interest in continuing the fight against Venice. This led to a peace treaty, signed in Milan on 1 June 1355, which penalized Venice but was less unfavorable to it than a military defeat would have predicted. Venice and Genoa pledged to abstain from hostile actions, to free all prisoners and not

frequent Tana for the next three years, until 1358. ⁹¹ Apart from the *Tane devetum*, the peace treaty did not substantially change the balance of power.

After signing the peace agreement in Milan on June 1, 1355, Genoa ⁹² and Venice respected the conditions they had imposed on themselves, and avoided sending their ships to Tana, but it was a situation too onerous for both. The huge investments made in the region to guarantee an adequate infrastructural system, together with the high profits generated by trade, required the two republics to restore contacts with the Mongolian authorities and regain possession of their *emporion* as soon as possible. On the other hand, this was also the wish of Janibeg, which had been heavily damaged by the war.

On 5 March 1356 Venice took the lead and organized an embassy to

the governor of Solgat, the Mongolian *noyon* Ramadan, responsible for all of Crimea. The envoys asked Ramadan to be allowed to return to Tana, to resettle in Soldaia and to maintain the *commerchium* at 3%. Perhaps to have the certainty of a direct dialogue at the highest levels, or perhaps because it did not completely trust the Mongolian governor, the Venetian senate ordered ambassador Andrea Venier to also go directly to Janibeg to forward the same requests,

including the release of two Venetian merchants arrested in Soldaia shortly before. ⁹³

The khan's response, however, was cold, and Venice only managed to establish itself in the small port city of Provato, a settlement near Caffa and decidedly modest compared to Soldaia both in terms of size and infrastructure. ⁹⁴ The Venetian ships could also go to Solgat, but upon departure they had to be checked by a Mongolian and a Venetian official so that they could together verify that there were no fugitive slaves on board. The new concession was also linked to compensation for damages suffered by a group of Mongolian merchants who, while traveling on a Genoese ship, had been robbed during the hostilities. Ramadan replied to the Venetian ambassadors that the consul's jurisdiction remained limited to the Latins alone and that if the Venetian merchants had cheated on duties they would have their assets confiscated. ⁹⁵

Although the terms of the agreement were restrictive, Venice had no choice but to accept them. The captain of the Romània galleys Niccolò Pisani was sent to control the territory of Provato in which the new Venetian settlement would be built. However, still in 1357, the Senate did not authorize the galleys of Romània - put up for auction in the month of May - to enter the Black Sea. It is probable that Venice did not consider the investment a good deal, especially since shortly thereafter the ban on returning to Tana would have expired. As per the treaty, the *Tane devetum* lapsed in 1358. For the first time since the Peace of Milan, Venetian galleys were authorized to head towards the ports of the Black Sea .

4. *The political crisis of the Golden Horde (1356-1359)*

At the beginning of the 1350s, once peace had returned with the Italian republics, Janibeg was able to turn to internal problems. The profound crisis facing the Ilkhanate, which continued to exist only nominally, presented opportunities for expansion, with the support of part of the Ilkhanid aristocracy. Some Persian sources expressly speak of pleas addressed by Muslim nobles to Janibeg to march on Tabriz and free the kingdom from the confusion and abuses of the new regents.

⁹⁷ For Janibeg the prospect lay ahead

possibility of annexing Azerbaijan, a region of great geopolitical importance, as the fertile Mughan plain not only constituted one of the most advanced economies in the entire Caucasus, but could accommodate a vast number of horses and troops in the event of war. The processing of fabrics, and silk in particular, was widely developed in the main cities of the region (Barda, Nakhchivan, Beylagan). The production of wine and oil was profitable, as was cereal production, thanks to a vast irrigation system connected to the Kura and Aras rivers. The Chobanid dynasty, as we have already seen, had proven completely incapable of guaranteeing the safety of the caravan routes. The loss of long-distance trade prompted the local nobility, along with the religious institutions, which derived the main income from it, to appeal to Janibeg to incorporate the Ilkhanid territory into the ulus Jochi. ⁹⁸ Between the end of 1356 and December of the following year, the Khan of the Horde broke through and advanced with his army southwards, heading straight for the Caucasus. The clash with Malik Ashraf's Chobanids took place in the —

Ugaian plain, where in 1357 Janibeg achieved a clear victory. The Jochids incorporated Azerbaijan into the Golden Horde, conquered Tabriz, and restored centralized, if provisional and shaky, power in Persia. ⁹⁹ After this success it seemed that *the ulus jochide* could expand further, but events took an unexpected turn. Having left for Saraj, again in 1357, Janibeg left his son Berdibeg (r. 1357-1359) as governor in Tabriz, but he died during the return journey. ¹⁰⁰ Berdibeg had to leave Tabriz to replace his father on the throne, and his departure effectively left Azerbaijan at the mercy of the local aristocracy, which had only formally, and for too short a time, submitted to the Yochid khan.

With the death of Janibeg, a phase of rapid decline also began within the Golden Horde, determined by both internal and external factors which culminated, in the 1360s, in a real civil war. The consequences on the Venetian Black Sea establishments did not take long to be felt. To understand this process it is necessary to emphasize three factors that acted in concert and contributed to accelerating processes of political disintegration: the bubonic plague, the Ottoman advance in the West and the end of the Yuan dynasty in China. We have already focused on the plague, and if we accept the figures we have as good, between 1346 and 1353 approximately 25% of the population of the Golden Horde lost their lives due to the disease. In Tana the victims were even more numerous; according to some estimates almost half of the residents in

Venetian part of the city died following the epidemic.

The Ottoman advance, on the other hand, reached the southern Balkans over the years

fifties of the fourteenth century and was consolidated in 1354, when the armies led by Suleyman Pasha (d. 1357), son of Sultan Orhan Bey (ca1281-1362), conquered the Byzantine stronghold of Gallipoli. In the following decades they continued their triumphal march in the Balkans until they took control of the Straits. Meanwhile, at the other end of Asia, in 1368 a rebellion led by a Chinese general swept away the Yuan dynasty, putting an end to Mongol domination and founding the Ming dynasty. The Ming, as we will see in the seventh chapter, adopted measures that on the one hand subordinated commercial relations to the establishment of political relations, and on the other, at least initially, were more aimed at maritime exploration and trade than at reopening continental routes. The two events, so distant geographically, had epochal consequences on Eurasian trade and in particular on the trade of the Venetians in the Mongol empire. An entire merchant class was affected by the ongoing transformations, which very quickly altered consolidated political and economic realities, involving not only Venetians and Genoese, but also Armenians, Arabs, Jews and Mongols.

Berdibeg's conduct as a destabilizing element must certainly be added to the external factors. Having returned to Saraj after the death of his father, and after having appointed a trusted governor in Tabriz, the new khan found himself facing new feuds within the aristocracy. ¹⁰² Berdibeg had ascended to the throne under obscure circumstances, probably after ordering the assassination of his father, and had the support of only a part of the nobility, including his grandmother Taydula, Uzbek's main wife and a figure of great weight within the politics ¹⁰³ throne in Such court conflicts, however common in Mongol succession processes. nomadic contexts, set centrifugal dynamics in motion. To strengthen his position and protect himself against any opposition, Berdibeg began a process of internal purging of possible contenders for the throne, namely the male descendants of Uzbek and Janibeg, his uncles and brothers. ¹⁰⁴ —

This policy of terror backfired against Berdibeg's intentions. Much of the nobility became hostile to him and his power immediately appeared unstable. Perhaps also for this reason, in the first months of his reign he restored the privileges enjoyed by Venice and Genoa to revive the economy and raise resources through taxes. On 24 September 1358 Berdibeg stipulated a new pact with the Venetian ambassadors Giovanni Quirini and Francesco Bon in which he renewed the concessions made in the past by Uzbek and Janibeg. ¹⁰⁵ Berdibeg granted Venice land separate from the Genoese neighborhood (*desparte dali Zenoesi*), and confirmed the levy on trade (*commerchium*), but increased it from 3% to 5% and calculated on the weight of the goods.

The extension of the settlement is unchanged compared to the past: one hundred paces in length by seventy in width, up to the water's edge ("the Safadin beach inver levante per longeza passa cento, per difina la riva delaqua passa LXX") . The entry of ships into the port was also carefully regulated. The fee to be paid to the Mongol governor of Tana, who was a certain Toghulubeg, was set at three sums for each ship, to be paid to the governor's officials (the *messengers*), and destined for the personal coffers of Empress Taydula.

¹⁰⁶ The governor himself, for his part, was personally responsible for the safety of the Venetians. If a ship had been damaged at Tana no one could have touched it before examination by the Venetian officials. disputes and crimes committed in the Venetian neighborhood ¹⁰⁷ The remained the responsibility of the consul, while every weighing operation had to be conducted by officials of both sides. The memory of the violence of 1343 was still fresh, and Berdibeg took precautions against any possible abuse, ordering that Venetians guilty of a crime against a Saracen or Mongol citizen were immediately handed over to the local authorities, who would judge them according to the khan's law. ¹⁰⁸ Two days later, on 26 September 1358, the Venetian ambassadors signed ¹⁰⁹ the document with Cotlug Timur, *noyon* of Solgat and successor of Ramadan, with which they obtained confirmation—

of the privileges in the other ports of the Sea of Azov and ¹¹⁰ in addition to the Crimean : a minor port between Sudak and Caffa, allowed to visit Soldaia on a ^{Provato} and Caliera, permanent basis. The transit costs remained unchanged compared to March 1356 and the Mongol assumed, as in The Concessions of ^{governor}

past, the responsibility for the safety of merchants. ¹¹¹

Berdibeg were, however, bound to the payment by Venice of all the damages that its galleys had caused, through acts of piracy, to Mongol merchants during and beyond the years of conflict, i.e. until 1353.

Previously the Venetian authorities had promised Ramadan to compensate for the damages, but had never honored their promise. Thus it was that on 26 September Berdibeg issued a decree in which he confirmed all the concessions in exchange for adequate compensation for damages which included over 2,300 sums of stolen goods, the death of two Mongol subjects, and imprisonment for over two years, of two other Mongols captured during the clashes.

¹¹² It

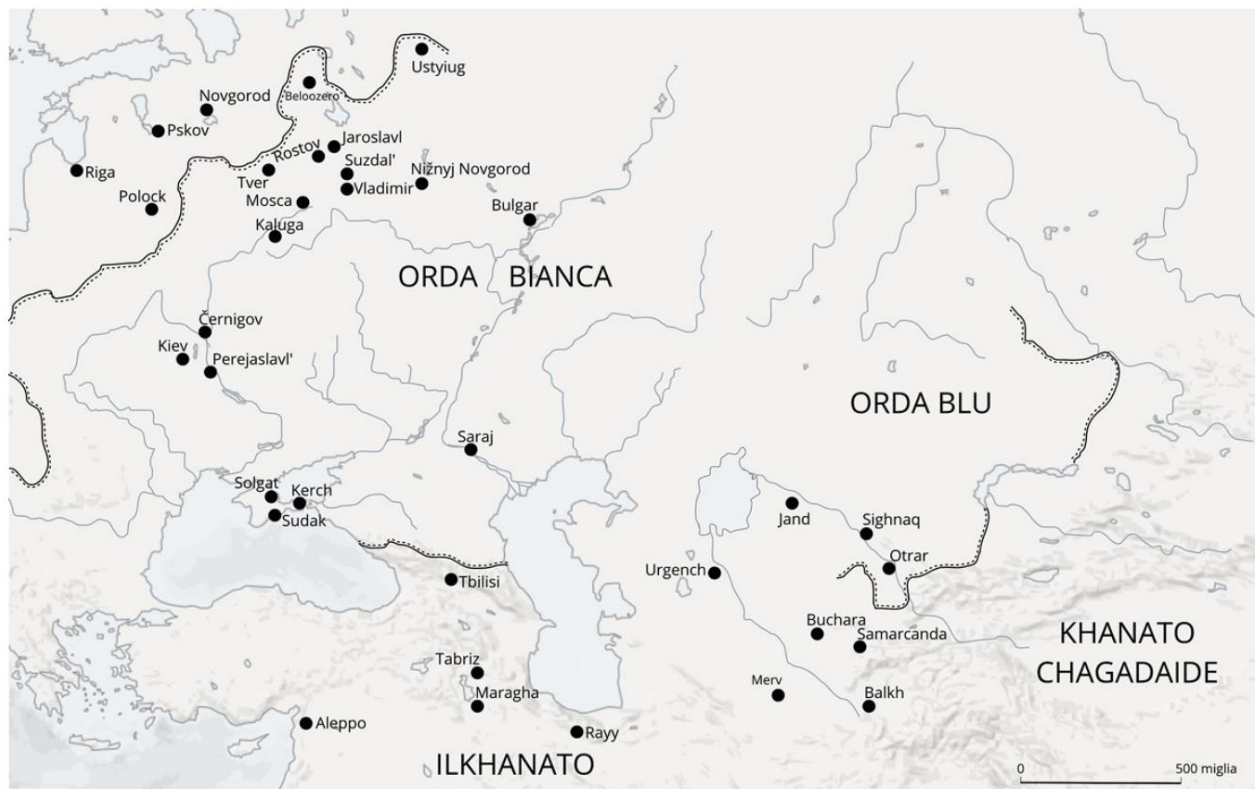
was the Empress Taydula (d. 1361), widow of Uzbek, who advanced part of the sum from her personal treasury («de nostra proprio cassana») to allow the Venetians to immediately return to operations in the region without waiting for transfers of funds from Venice.

— Taydula was a charismatic and very authoritative figure who had remained at the center of the political scene for about twenty years, promoting

the election of Janibeg first and then of Berdibeg. Her power derived not only from her position as khan's wife and mother, but from the prestige she enjoyed among the most influential *noyon* and vast personal resources. She was always Christian and never converted to Islam, and perhaps this also explains the intervention in favor of the resumption of trade with the Latin merchants, beyond her own interests. At the end of September 1358, having signed the new treaties, Venice sent personal.

[114](#)

Pietro Caravello as the new consul in Tana, with funds equal to 80 silver sums also intended for the construction of his home. [115](#) Romanian-Black Sea galleys were auctioned and— They were put the shipowners' response was good: the average amount invested was 160 lire compared to the average 50 lire recorded during the years of the crisis.



Map 1. The division between the White Horde and the Blue Horde

But just when it seemed that Venice had found a reliable interlocutor, Berdibeg was assassinated in 1359 by his brother Qulpa following internal struggles linked to the succession to the throne. Qulpa was the *noyon* who had control of what the Mongols called Ak Orda (White Horde), or the western part of the Ulus Jochi. [116](#) At the time of the formation of the ulus, this had been entrusted to Batu, second son of Jochi, while the left wing (Blue Horde or

eastern, given that the Mongols, who oriented from north to south) had gone to the eldest Hordu (fl. 1225-1252), and covered the territory ¹¹⁷ between the right bank of the Syr Darya, at the height of the city of Signaq, and the eastern coast of the Aral Sea, in present-day Kazakhstan.

The region had no large cities and was inhabited by nomadic populations of Turkish origin, demographically prevalent over the Mongols. ¹¹⁸ What we conventionally call the Golden Horde (a term never used by the Mongols) was nothing other than the combination of the two territories, western and eastern, in a single political entity at the center of which was the imperial prerogative (*ordo*), or Saraj. Although formally subjected to the authority of the Jochid khan, the Blue Horde of Hordu always maintained a relative independence and even during the most turbulent periods assumed autonomous positions, sometimes adhering to those of the Jochids, sometimes in open contrast with them.

Berdibeg's death accelerated a process of disintegration already underway and in particular favored the westward advancement of the Blue Horde, but it did not calm the internal disagreements of the dominant clan, and in 1360 Qulpa was in turn killed by another brother, Nawruz (d. May or June 1360). The testimonies on these events are conflicting and based on numismatic findings not supported by written sources. On the basis of some coins struck by the Saraj mint Berdibeg would have reigned until 1361 and not until 1359.

¹¹⁹ However, this version is contradicted by the papers of the priest Benedetto Bianco, who in 1358 settled in Tana as the consul's notary. In a document issued on 1 September 1359 Bianco states that when he began to carry out his activity the khan of the Golden Horde was Berdibeg ("ruling Berdibech, most serene emperor of Tartarorum"), but that four days after his death he took power Qulpa («creatus fuit alius imperator nome Colbadinus ĵan») who, in turn, was overthrown and executed together with two of his sons in February 1360 during the coup of ¹²⁰ This means that already at the beginning of 1360 on the throne there 'had been of Nawruz.

Nawruz, who, moreover, according to Benedict White, passed himself off as a descendant of Uzbek without any foundation ("sine aliqua meritorie").

The political instability following Berdibeg's death forced Venice to act quickly to prevent the power vacuum from leading to a new stalemate in political and commercial relations or provoking a hostile reaction from the Mongols, as had happened after Uzbek's death in 1341. Sending a delegation to the new khan was a necessary act, a diplomatic practice, but in this case also an essential step to defend the privileges that Venice had recently restored in Tana and in other places subject to the authority Mongolian. On 13 January 1360 Giovanni Quirini and Francesco Bon left

back to Saraj with the aim of obtaining from the khan the renewal of the franchises granted by Berdibeg and if possible reducing the *commerchium* from 5% ¹²¹ to 3% or at least to 4%.

— They obtained a fund of 500 ducats, to be spent on gifts (in the document reference is made to precious items) and whatever else was necessary for the success of the mission.

The months that elapsed between the death of Berdibeg and that of Nawruz were hectic and Saraj lost the political centrality it had had since its foundation. Jochid politics had been characterized, since the reign of Toqta, by a marked tendency towards centralization and strengthening of the imperial clan which had systematically reduced the political space of the nobility. At the same time, the khan had left to the members of the local aristocracy both considerable autonomy in the management of the provinces and a part of the tax revenue of commercial origin. This did not resolve the latent conflict between central and peripheral interests, which exploded after Berdibeg's death, followed shortly thereafter by that of Taydula.

In 1360 the Jochid dynasty came to an end. The disappearance of Batu's descendants exacerbated rivalries and attracted the nobility of the Blue Horde towards the west, starting a progressive and unstoppable fragmentation of power. With it, political instability increased, and to maintain its positions on the markets of the Golden Horde, Venice was forced to resort to new diplomatic maneuvers.

¹. Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 218.

². Karpov, *Génoise et Byzantines face à la crise de Tana*, pp. 65-77.

³. *Die Cronik Joanns von Winterthur*, p. 219.

⁴. Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 267.

⁵. *Laurentii de Monacis Chronicon*, p. 207.

⁶. Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 267; ASV, SM, XXI, 83v.

⁷. *Laurentii de Monacis Chronicon*, p. 207; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 268.

⁸. Canale, *Crimea*, II, p. 458; Heyd, *History of Trade*, p. 757; Skržinskaja, *History of the Burrow*, p. 10.

⁹. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 151, p. 51.

¹⁰. If the sentence imposed against Civran was light, the interweaving of parental ties between all the exponents of the Venetian patriciate personally involved in the trade in Tana must be considered. These ties were so close that when the trial against Civran was instituted it was impossible to find judges who did not have blood ties to the merchants involved in the incidents of 1343.

¹¹. According to Villani they would amount to 300 thousand gold florins for Venice and 350 thousand for Genoa: Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, XXVII, p. 368. From a communication made by the captain of the galleys of Romania Marco Morosini the Mongols «arrogantissimus Scitha sive Tartarus, ortoprivate quarrel, alapam dedit cuidam Veneto de Ciurana prole [...] Tartars conglobati in multitudinem insurgunt furioso impetu in Christianos»: *Diplomatarium veneto- Levantinum*, vol. I, p. 268. Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 154; Karpov, *Krizis Tany*, pp. 121-126.

¹². Archaeological excavations conducted a few years ago revealed traces of fires in Tana dating back to this period. Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 100; Maslovsky, *Podval kupežeskogo doma*, pp. 93-124.

¹³. Pope Clement VI allowed Venice to send its market galleys to Alexandria

in the spring of 1344. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 277-278.

[14.](#) Heyd, *History of Trade*, II, p. 187.

[15.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 329-331.

[16.](#) Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXI, p. 311.

[17.](#) Sanudo, *Vitae ducum Venetorum*, col. 611; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 266-267; Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, pp. 101-102.

[18.](#) Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXI, pp. 300-305.

[19.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 162, p. 54.

[20.](#) This number also occurs in sources with different references. Winterthur, for example, writes that sixty were the Venetian victims of the Mongol retaliations after Civran had killed Omar and his family. The situation did not improve even as the months passed. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 367-368: «At this time a great fight had begun in the city of Tana in the Mar Maggiore in Romania between the Venetians and Saracens of the land [...] and they then took Latin merchants from they were not dead, and they were in prison for two years." A resolution of the Venetian senate confirms the news reported by the Florentine chronicler, according to which the arrested merchants, according to the rumors coming from there ("a romore"), are still alive (Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 169, p. 55).

[21.](#) «Personarum nostrarum qui per mperoram Tartarorum Zanibech in duris tormentis miserabiliter detineri dicuntur»: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 320.

[22.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 165, p. 54; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 321.

[23.](#) The terms of the journey were then established in a resolution dated May 31st; the galleys could not transport any goods without explicit authorization, under penalty of a fine equal to 50% of the value transported (ASV, SM, XXII, f. 24; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 326).

[24.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 278.

[25.](#) Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, pp. 281-282.

[26.](#) Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 207; Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, pp. 290-292.

[27.](#) Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 108 and note 90; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 279-284; Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 294.

[28.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 139.

[29.](#) *Ibid.*

[30.](#) Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 270; Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXII, pp. 268-269.

[31.](#) Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 271.

[32.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 282. Genoa and Venice sign a treaty by which they impose an embargo on the markets of the Horde and undertake not to negotiate a separate peace with the Mongols. check carefully.

[33.](#) «All the merchants and inhabitants of Solgat desire peace as do all the people of the Tartars» (omnes mercatores de Sorgati et omnis populus multum dixerat habere pacem et similiter populus Tartarorum habere pacem dixerat): Morozzo Della Rocca, *Notizie da Caffa* , pp. 277-278. See also Papacostea, *Quod non iretur ad Tanam*, p. 206.

[34.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 299. The document expressly states that the league with Genoa is established "pro factis ac negotijs Maris Maioris et imperii Gazarie et occasion guerre, dissensionis et discordie".

[35.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 303-305. Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, pp. 283-284.

[36.](#) Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 271; Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXIII, pp. 18, 22, 30-32.

[37.](#) «Non faciet [...] pacem, concordiam vel remissionem cum dicto emperor Ianibech vel eius curia, officialibus vel subditis seu imperio suo, vel aliquo successor suo», *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 302.

[38.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 302.

[39.](#) On this also Papacostea, *Quod non iretur ad Tanam*, p. 207.

40. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 303: «liberi et immunes in dicta civitate [Caffae] ab omnibus drectibus, cabellis, introytibus, comercij, seu exactionibus, que in ipso loco colliguntur». Also Papacostea, *Quod non iretur ad Tanam*, p. 208.

41. «Regere possit Venetos et homines Venetiarum ibidem existentes, conversantes et morantes», *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 303.

42. «Quia naturam humana, malicia hoinum crescent, oportuit jure et iusticie esse totaliter subiugatum [...] et sic necessaryum esse dignoscitur, quod prave agents penis debts punitiantur», *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 304.

43. Ibid., vol. I, p. 303; Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 148.

44. Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 274. Since «non apparet spes aliqua possendi habere concordium cum emperor Zanibech»: *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIII, p. 126.

45. From which they will never leave. Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, pp. 211-212; Breasts Balbi, *Caffa and Pera in the mid-fourteenth century*, p. 226.

46. de Mussi, *History of disease*, pp. 26-59.

47. The debate on the origin of the plague in East Asia is still open, but the first news of widespread and inexplicable mortality in China is recorded in the sources already at the time of the Mongol conquest of the Xi Xia kingdom, 1226/1227. For a complete picture and new hypotheses see Hym, *Epilogue*, pp. 285-307 and especially pp. 287-288. Outbreaks of the epidemic in Yuan China had already occurred from 1307 and between 1344-45. Ibid., pp. 299-300; Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 253.

48. Karpov, *Black Sea and crisis*, p. 67; Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 256.

49. The first example of bacteriological warfare was also discussed: Wheelis, *Biological Warfare*, pp. 971-975.

50. The bibliography on the Black Death of the 14th century is immense. For an overall picture, alongside the classics already mentioned, see Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*; Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague*; Pamuk, *The Black Death and the Origins*, pp. 289-317; Green, *Taking "Pandemic" Seriously*, pp. 27-61; Green, *The Four Black Deaths*, pp. 1601-1631.

51. «Partes aquilonaris». Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis*, pp. 68-69.

52. Langer, *The Black Death*, pp. 53-67. See also Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 256; Schamiloglu, *Preliminary remarks*, pp. 449-450.

53. Romano, *The Economic History*, pp. 1842-1850; Schamiloglu, *The Impact of the Black Death*, p. 326. Winterthur himself, in his chronicle, notes that in the winter of 1343 a serious famine, which he witnessed directly, struck Germany due to which many had to adapt to eating herbs and roots to survive (*Die Cronik Joanns von Winterthur*, pp. 200 and 205).

54. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 219-220.

55. Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis*, p. 68.

56. Agnolo di Tura is the continuer of the Chronicle begun by Andrea Dei. He wrote the history of his city from 1186 to April 1348, the point from which Agnolo's story begins and the beginning, according to the chronicler, of the pandemic that hit Siena. *Chronicle of Siena*, pp. 122-123 and Benedictow, *The Complete History of the Black Death*, p. 244.

57. Matteo himself was a victim of the disease in the second wave that hit Florence in 1362. Matteo Villani, *Cronica*, vol. I, p. 5.

58. Meanwhile, the Venetian galleys sent to Romania were authorized to enter the Black Sea only after hearing the opinion of the bailiff of Constantinople. At home there was no certain information on a constantly evolving situation that could change at any moment. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 185, p. 58; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIII, p. 128.

59. Cherubini, *The crisis of the fourteenth century*, pp. 660-670; Romano, *Economic history*. On the consequences of the crisis in the context of international trade, see Tangheroni, *Commerce and navigation*; Kedar, *Merchants in Crisis*; Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis*, pp. 65-66.

60. «Non obstante strictura contenta in parte predicta, cum ista condicione, quod cum navigiis, cum quibus navigabunt ad partes predictas, redeant Venecias loading wheat vel blado, vel vacui exeant de terris et partibus Zanibech». *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIV, pp. 46-47; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 336; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, 196, p. 60. See also Karpov, *Black Sea*

and the Crisis, p. 68.

61. Ibid., p. 69; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 720; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 277; Lopez, *Nouveaux documents*, p. 454 and Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 200.

62. Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis*, p. 69 and note 8.

63. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*; Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, especially chap. VIII; also Pertusi, *End of Byzantium and end of the world*.

64. Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis*, pp. 68-69.

65. Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, pp. 152-154.

66. In February 1345, ambassador Niccolò Zeno stipulated a treaty by which Sultan al-Salih (r. 1342-1345) allowed Venetian merchants to return to Alexandria and all the other ports of the state. The treaty was renewed by al-Salih's successor, al-Kamil (r. 1345-1346) in August. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 289-298. It is from this moment that Venice will progressively regain a dominant position on the markets controlled by the Mamluks.

67. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 192, p. 60; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXII, p. 184.

68. Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 274; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 336-338 and Papacostea, *Quod non iretur ad Tanam*, p. 208.

69. Morozzo della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 275; Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 119.

70. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 201, p. 61; Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 275.

71. As shown by the resolution of the Senate of 19 June 1347: «quoniam nova habemus quod Imperator Zanibech cum Ianuensibus est concordatus». *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIV, p. 72. And in another paper dated 14 July the Senate shows that it has finally decided to follow a different strategy by withdrawing "totaliter a facto compositionis". *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIV, pp. 103-104; Morozzo Della Rocca, *News from Caffa*, p. 275.

72. «[...] our Venetian Franks are given a place divided from that of Zenoessi, to be able to carry out their mercadantie», *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 311.

73. Calculating that the Venetian pace in these years was equivalent to five feet and that one foot measured approximately 0.340 meters. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 311: «To the east along the longheza passes C, and through the archeza passes LXX at the end on the bank of the river».

74. On the condition of citizenship at Tana, see Pubblici, *Venice and the Sea of Azov*. The *cives* of documents was a temporary legal condition reserved for those who operated within the Venetian area of Tana to enjoy the benefits granted to Genoa and Venice.

75. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, pp. 24-26; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 312.

76. The consul could trade but had to abstain from the role of broker/weigher to avoid conflicts of interest. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 340-341.

77. «Remittendo residuum Venecias per incantum dominio vel officialibus furmenti»: ASV, SM, XXIV, f. 114; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 340-341.

78. ASV, SM, XXIV, 35; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 340.

79. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, p. 340.

80. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 211, p. 63. The tension is evidenced by another act, from November 1349, in which Pietro Tagliapietra, captain of the Bitici Niddo galley, was condemned in Venice because he had attacked the Tatars of the port of Varango (Varangolimen in western Crimea) considering them to be wrongly responsible for the theft on his ship (Karpov, *Latinskaja Romanija*, p. 181).

81. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 217, p. 64; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIV, pp. 440-441.

82. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 239, p. 69; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXVI, p. 47. The resolution to arm the galleys of Romania was rejected with 8 votes against 2 in favour.

83. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 244 and 245, pp. 70-71.

84. Ibid., n. 245, p. 71.

85. Ibid., n. 247, p. 71. On the Veneto-Genoese war also ASV, Procurators of San Marco, Commissioners, envelope 2: it contains letters and receipts from Marco Nani, very interesting as Nani, a merchant with predominantly interests in Cyprus, was captain of the galley of Pancrazio Giustiniani during the war.

[86.](#) The agreement between Venice and the Aragonese crown was signed on 16 January 1351. Costa, *On the Battle of the Bosphorus*, p. 198. See also Balard, *A propos de la bataille du Bosphore*, pp. 431-469; Werner, *Die Geburt einer Grossmacht*, p. 140.

[87.](#) Kyrris, *John Cantacuzenus*, pp. 331-356; Costa, *On the Battle of the Bosphorus*, pp. 197-210.

[88.](#) *Ibidem* and Balard, *A propos de la bataille du Bosphore*, pp. 431-469.

[89.](#) Costa, *On the Battle of Bosphorus*, pp. 208-210.

[90.](#) Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean*, pp. 158-159. The text of the treatise is published in Medvedev, *Dogovor Vizantii i Genui*, pp. 161-172.

[91.](#) Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées*, I, p. 233.

[92.](#) Thiriet, *Venise et l'occupation de Ténédos*, pp. 224-225; Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, pp. 176-177; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, pp. 85-86.

[93.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 273, p. 77; Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 24.

[94.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 299, p. 82; the concession dates back to March 1356. Ramadan confirmed the port of Provato to the Venetians in the name of Citade Nova; see also *Diplomatarium Veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, p. 25.

[95.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 242.

[96.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 328, pp. 88-89.

[97.](#) Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, p. 161; Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Horde d'Oro*, p. 221; Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde*, p. 100. Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 245.

[98.](#) Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade*, p. 200 and n. 234.

[99.](#) In the year 757 AH (1356) the mint of Tabriz minted coins with the effigy of Janibeg. See Masson Smith-Plunkett, *Gold Money*, pp. 290-293; Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, p. 222.

[100.](#) There are still many doubts about the causes of Janibeg's death today. That is, it is not clear whether he died a natural death, the plague or whether he was murdered by one of his *begs* in the context of the frequent dynastic disputes within the Horde. The most convincing version is that it was his son Berdibeg who ordered the assassination of his father, instigated by Emir Toglu-bai, to take his place. For example, this is the version in Nikon's Russian chronicle (*Letopisnyj sbornik*, p. 229). See also Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 261-262.

[101.](#) Chajdarov, *Épidemija ĵumy*, pp. 49-51.

[102.](#) See on this Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, especially chapter 5 on pp. 155-157. Even the recent conquests in the southern Caucasus had been lost, reconquered by the anti-Jochid revolt of the local nobility led by the Huleguide dynasty of the Jalairids as early as 1358.

[103.](#) On the figure of the empress see Favereau, Geevers, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 469-470.

[104.](#) According to some sources Berdibeg also ordered the murder of his son. Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 261-262.

[105.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 47-51; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 154; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 311, p. 85.

[106.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, p. 50.

[107.](#) It is interesting to note that the document expressly refers to the Genoese as the most looming threat: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, p. 50.

[108.](#) *Ibid.*

[109.](#) The governor of Solgat was the highest ranking Mongol official in Gazaria.

[110.](#) Heyd, *The trading colonies*, pp. 113-114.

[111.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, p. 51; Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, p. 289.

[112.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, n. 26, pp. 52 and 53.

[113.](#) As further proof of how much weight and independence the empress had even after the death of Husband. *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, n. 28, pp. 53-54.

[114.](#) Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 262-263.

[115.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, n. 335, p. 90; ASV, Lower Chancellery (henceforth CI), ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, file. 7, reg. 1, ff. 7r, 9r, 13v and 14r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 51, 62, 85, 87, pp. 32, 36, 41-42.

[116.](#) On the confusion between the Blue Horde and the White Horde, see Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 41-42.

[117](#). Rashid ad-Din, *Compendium*, II, pp. 335-336; Grousset, *L'empire des steppes*, p. 469.

[118](#). Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 251 et seq. Recent excavations have found a rather large number of peasant villages in the area around Lake Alakol, today on the border between Kazakhstan and China.

[119](#). See Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 227-228.

[120](#). Version confirmed by Russian sources. Karpov, *Najalo smuty v Zolotoj Orde*, p. 531.

[121](#). Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, nn. 355 and 358, p. 95.

Illustrations



Fig. 1. Bust of Andrea Dandolo, Doge of Venice (r. 1343-1354). Venetian Pantheon, Veneto Institute of Sciences, Letters and Arts, Palazzo Loredan, Venice.



Fig. 2. A Venetian galley transporting pilgrims to the Holy Land, taken from Conrad Grünenberg's travel diary (1487). Beschreibung der Reise von Konstanz nach Jerusalem. Bodenseegebiet, um 1487. Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, Cod. St. Peter, pap. 32., ff. 5v-6r.



Fig. 3. Walls of the Genoese fortress of Sudak (Crimea), 14th century.



Fig. 4. Large Venetian by Andrea Dandolo (1343-1354). Ranieri Numismatic Collection, Bologna. Auction held 2-7 November 2010, lot 583.



Fig. 5. Depiction of a Mongolian nobleman (first from left). Detail from Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Martyrdom of five Franciscan friars*, ca. 1336-37. Siena, San Francesco, chapter house.



Fig. 6. Jani Beg, Khan of the Golden Horde (1342-1357). Detail from the *Catalan Atlas* (1375). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Esp. 30, fol. V.

цареву сыну Джанибекову Бердибеку, хваля его и вознося: «Настало время тебе сесть на царство, а отцу твоему уже время сойти с царства». И начал помалу советовать ему убить своего отца Джанибека, сына Азбяка. И много князей ордынских привлек на свою сторону, обещая кому что дать.

цареву сыну Чянивекову Бердинеку, хвала его и возносю, глаголю: «Яко время ти есть седеши на царстве, а отцу твоему уже время сингги со царствия». И тако нача помалку советовать ему увести отца его Чяникеа, Дзюкова сына. И тако многих князей орднских привлекающе к себе в совет, обещающе комуждо что дати.

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Fig. 7. Miniature depicting the assassination of Jani Beg by Berdi Beg. From *Licevoj letopisnyj svod XVIv. Russkaja Letopisnaja istorija*, 8, 1343-1372gg. Sankt Petersburg, Otdel Rukopisej Biblioteki Akademii Nauk 31-7.30-2, f. 497.



Fig. 8. Timur enters Samarkand with his troops. Folio from *Zafarnama* (1436), by Yazdi (d. 1450). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution Washington DC, USA.

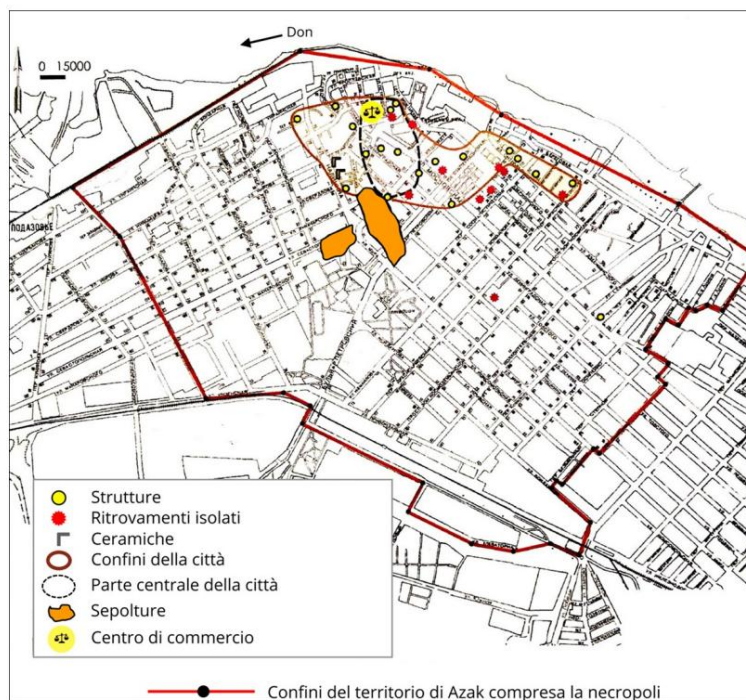


Fig. 9. Topographic plan of Azaq in 1290 from the excavations of AN Maslovsky (based on Karpov, *Istoriya Tany*).

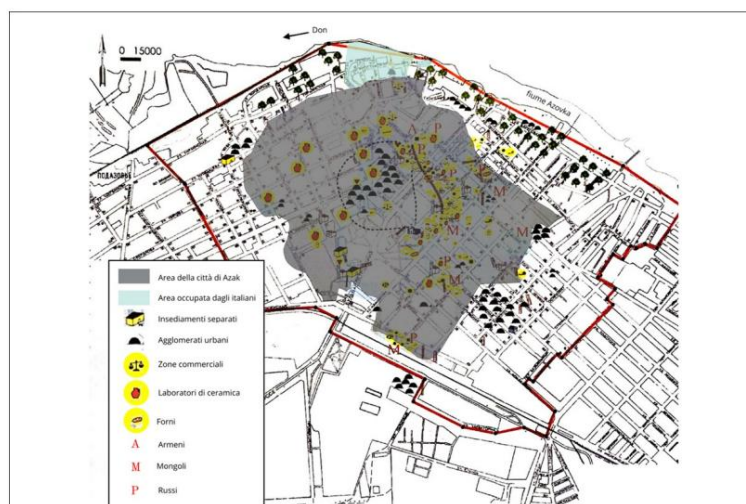


Fig. 10. Topographic plan of Azaq and Tana in the 1440s, from the excavations of AN Maslovsky (based on Karpov, *Istorija Tany*).

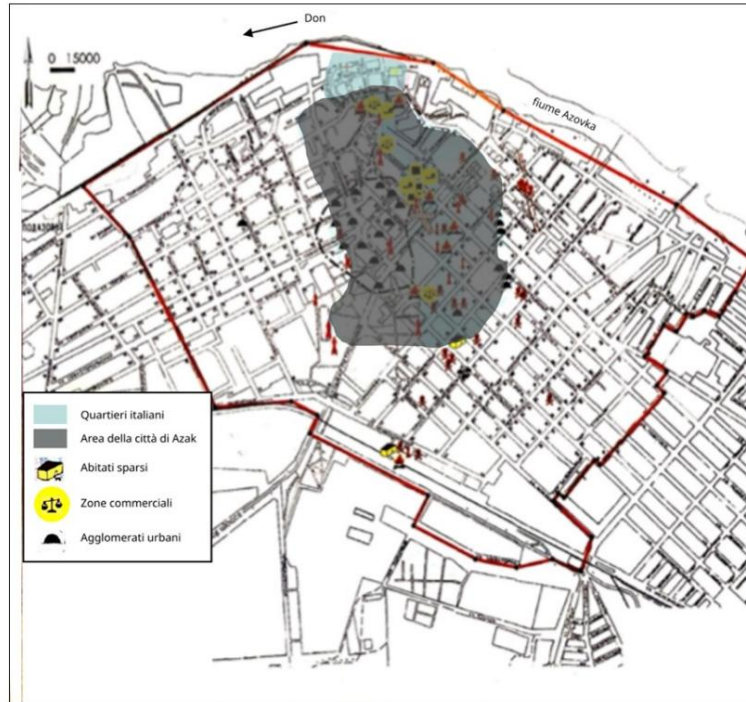


Fig. 11. Topographic plan of Azaq and Tana at the end of the 14th century, from the excavations of AN Maslovsky (based on Karpov, *Istorija Tany*).



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Fig. 12. Coins of the Golden Horde: a) Silver coin, Telebuga period (1287-1290);
b) Silver coin, 1351-1356, Jani Beg period (1342-1357); c) Azaq coin, Berdibeg
period (1357-1359).



Fig. 13. Qubilai issues the imperial pass (paiza) in gold to the Polo brothers.
Miniature from *Il Milione*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 2810, f. 3v.



Fig. 14. Page of the manuscript by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *Pratica della Mercatura*, in the drafting of Filippo di Niccolò Frescobaldi (1472). Florence, Riccardiana Library, Riccardiano, Ricc. 2441.

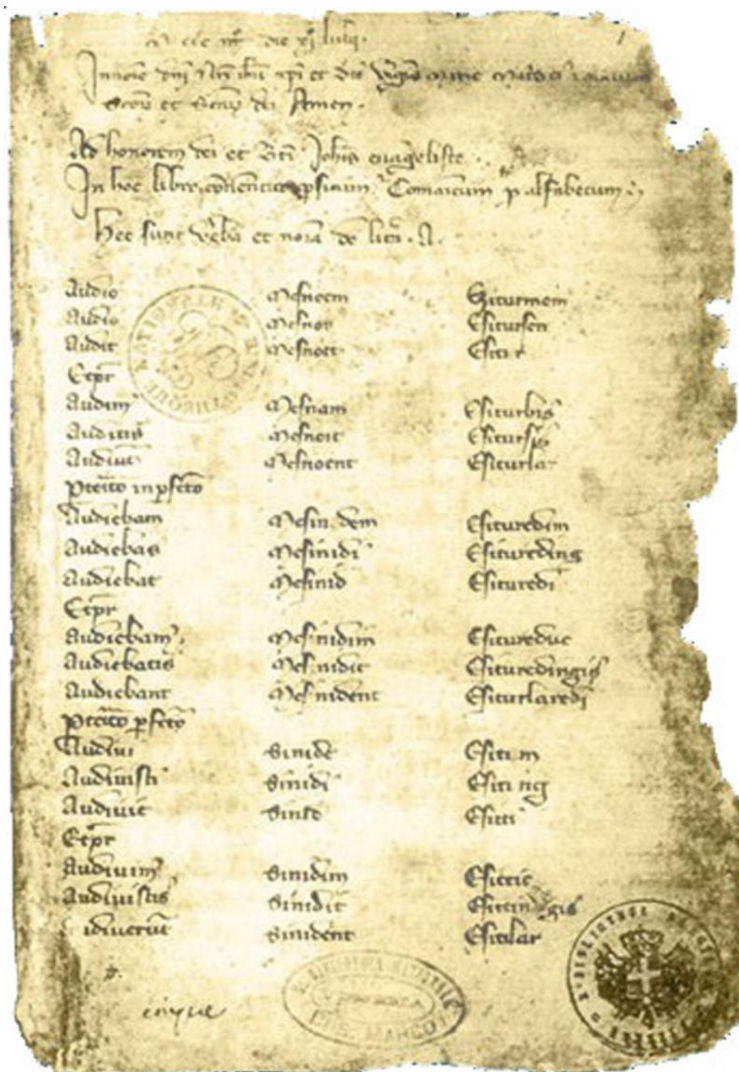


Fig. 15. Page of the *Codex Cumanicus*, with trilingual lexicon (Latin, Persian, Cumanic Turkish). Venice, Marciana National Library, Cod. Marc. Lat. Z. 549 (=1597).

6. Venice and the Mongols in the years of the Jochid crisis (1360-1395)

1. *The Horde crisis and the Venetian reaction*

The end of political unity in the Golden Horde

With the death of Berdibeg in 1359, Batu's lineage ended and in the following twenty years a confused and ferocious power struggle began. Since the time of Uzbek, who himself rose to the top of the khanate thanks to the support of the aristocracy, regional political power was de facto in the hands of the local nobility, made up of *emirs*, *begs* and *noyons* - depending on whether Arab titles were used, Turks or Mongols – whose power was based on the forces they were able to deploy in war and on the alliances they were able to manage.

¹ The governors of the large administrative areas belonged to the highest ranks of this nobility, among which Crimea occupied a leading place thanks above all to its enormous agricultural resources and the huge tax revenues generated by trade. Berdibeg's death only exacerbated the internal political crisis already underway, leading to the splitting of the Horde into two main political subdivisions, each dominated by one or more clans. The White Horde occupied the western part, west of the Volga to the Russian principalities, and effectively also controlled the capital Sarai. To the east lay the Blue Horde, which included the territories east of the Volga and Central Asia. The political division between the two parties was based on conflicting hegemonic claims which, as we will see, marked, in an often chaotic series of twists and internal struggles, the second half of the century, culminating in the long and devastating conflict between Timur and Toqtamys. The history of the Italian settlements on the Black Sea was directly conditioned by continuous political storms, in which the Latin authorities could only play a passive role, limited to diplomatic and defensive actions.

Since the death of Berdibeg and Taydula, the khans of the Horde, who resided in Saraj, had effectively lost control of most of the territory, and in any case their position was continually contested, generating enormous instability. The political process to guarantee legitimacy, even partial, to the khan of the moment, developed in the form of a sort of protectorate of the White Horde, which in fact arrogated to itself, thanks to its military superiority, the right to elect a khan as long as he was a Chinggiside. Descent from the conqueror was an essential condition for accessing the throne, but by now the descendants who could boast this lineage had lost the political weight of their predecessors.

In the months between the end of 1360 and October 1361, coins were minted with the effigies of five different khans, including Berdibeg himself, who had died a year earlier.

² For their part, the two halves of the empire, the western one which had its center in the Crimea, and the eastern one which had the city of Sighnaq as its capital, had similar problems, both lacking dynastic prestige. The centrifugal effects were felt in various parts of the empire, such as in ³ where the Sufi-Qonggirat dynasty was in power, a powerful Khwarezmian, Turkish-Mongol clan that arose become around a Mongol tribe to which Börte, the consort of Chinggis Khan, who had long since Islamized.

⁴

The Qonggirat governed northern Khwarezmia with the approval of the khan of the Golden Horde, but following the collapse of the central authority they occupied the important city of Urgench, and from 1364 they formally declared themselves independent from Saraj. From Urgench, a strategic city from a commercial point of view, the Qonggirat were able to expand into Central Asia on the territory of the Chagadai khanate, which was also weakened by internal strife.

The growth of the western wing and the affirmation of Mamaï

We saw in the previous chapter that shortly after taking control of Saraj, Nawruz was assassinated in a conspiracy of nobles who supported the eastern wing (Blue Horde), and who favored the rise to power of the Shaybanid Kidyr. Russian sources describe it as a man (d. 1361), in the Volga region. Horde, and to reassert Mongol authority over ⁵ strong, determined to re-establish central power in the vassal states. ⁶ However, in 1361 he himself was the victim of a conspiracy perhaps hatched by his son Timur Hogja, who reigned for a few weeks before being overthrown himself by another emir at the head

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of the western wing of the Horde: Mamaï (d. 1381).

⁸

Born in Crimea around 1335, Mamaï was a member of the Mongolian military aristocracy that had previously benefited enormously from

weak reign of Berdibeg and then by the succession crisis. Between 1357 and 1359 he reached the highest ranks of the Horde's bureaucratic and military apparatus, holding the positions of minister of justice, chief of staff and governor of the Crimea one after the other. From 1359 he supported Abdul Khan, one of the pretenders to the throne and antagonist of Qulpa, brother and murderer of Berdibeg.

Mamaï was also Berdibeg's son-in-law through his marriage to his daughter Tulunbek (d. ca. 1386).⁹ He eventually became the commander-in-chief (*beglerbeg*) of the western wing, which included the Crimea and the northern Black Sea basin. Mamaï could not aspire to become a legitimate khan as he was not himself Chinggiside, and therefore his elevation to the throne it would have been considered a usurpation. Instead, he assumed the role of "great elector" and *kingmaker*, and as such supported several khans, none of whom, however, were able to reunify *the ulus jochide*.

In addition to the unpredictability of political developments on the Mongolian side, the Venetians in Tana also found themselves facing an internal crisis. The Peace of Milan had silenced the weapons but had not resolved the hostilities, and the waste from the conflict that ended a few years earlier had not yet been completely disposed of. Coexistence with the Genoese in Tana continued to cause concern in Venice. At the end of 1359 tensions between the two communities had worsened. The Venetian authorities forwarded an official letter to the Genoese doge to protest against the violation of the rights of the Venetians in Constantinople and in particular in Pera. The Venetian settlement in the Byzantine capital was strategically unavoidable because all the goods that came from the Black Sea ports or were directed there passed through there. The Genoese authorities in Constantinople boycotted Venetian commercial activity, hindering in particular the trade of basic necessities, cereals and wine.

¹⁰ It was perhaps to counter Genoese hostility that, on 27 February 1360, the Senate sent two ambassadors to Tana to urge the new khan to renew the pacts and all the exemptions.

¹¹ But precisely in those days, as we have seen, Nawruz put an end to the short reign of Qulpa, starting the political crisis of the Golden Horde.

Although even in the most difficult years there had never been a lack of hegemonic power, albeit unstable and weaker than in the past, the rapid political changes in themselves constituted a condition of uncertainty. Before Mamaï took full control of the White Horde, Venice lacked a stable interlocutor who had a recognized authority and guaranteed the Republic compliance with the agreements. This forced Venice to resort to new and multiple diplomatic operations. The authorities of the Republic tried first of all to attenuate the rivalry with Genoa. On 13 January 1361 the Venetian doge

Giovanni Delfino and the Genoese Simone Boccanegra stipulated an agreement so that the inhabitants of Tana would abstain from fights and arguments and live together in peace.¹² The basis of the agreement were special powers given to the consuls of both cities to sanction their fellow citizens depending on the extent of the crime («secundum enormitatem delicti»). The use of weapons was restricted and subjected to the exclusive authority of the consul, fining transgressors with fines which¹³ Furthermore they could reach 200 ducats or Genovins. had ¹⁴ it was established that in this case the consuls and baili themselves, in Tana or Constantinople, not respected the agreements, the doge would have intervened in person. ¹⁴ In two letters, dated February 1st and 4th 1361, Simon Boccanegra and Giovanni Delfino ratified the agreements in a peace treaty for Crimea and Tana ("per totum imperium Gazarie").

¹⁵ At that juncture the peace with Genoa gave some respite to Venetian activity on the Black Sea.

The sixties

At the beginning of the 1960s the various tensions that had developed in the eastern Mediterranean, caused in particular by the hostile climate towards Venice that was developing in ¹⁶ they had already reduced the number of galleys placed Crete, led to the auction: in 1361 out of five galleys only four found their ¹⁷ These owner. new complications were grafted onto a commercial situation that was in itself compromised since, due to bad relations with Trebizond and the collapse of the Ilkhanate, commercial navigation had already favored Tana since the 1940s.

¹⁸ Furthermore, with the death of the emperor of Trebizond Basil in April 1340, a war of succession had begun, degenerating into a civil war, which had interrupted commercial relations. A few years later, the Venetian settlement was struck by the plague, after which the Venetian-Genoese war and the *Tane devetum* had completely excluded Trebizond from the great Black Sea trade until 1358.

Relations improved from the beginning of the 1960s due to events within the politics of Trabzon. In 1349, just eleven years old, John Comnenus ascended the throne with the name of Alexios III (1338-1390), who after a few years, having reached maturity, inaugurated a series of reforms that brought Trebizond back to the center of Pontine traffic. Political stability favored the resumption of commercial relations, and from 1363 relations between Trebizond and Venice were re-established, as were the voyages of the Venetian galleys in the southern Black Sea. In 1364 the captain of the Roman galleys Domenico Michiel received instructions obtained to continue to Trebizond with the ambassador Guglielmo Michiel, ¹⁹ from ¹⁹ that

from Alexios III a chrysobol that guaranteed Venetian merchants access to the ports, free movement and protection by the local authorities. ²⁰ Relations between Venice and the empire of Trebizond formally resumed in May. From 1359 to 1366 Venice regularly sent galleys to the with the sole exception of the following year. ²² Sea of ²¹ of 1364, the year in which, according to a resolution
Azov —

of the Venetian Senate on 21 July, the way to Tana seemed closed. ²³ In this period the number of galleys and the prices of the auctions remained very low, with the latter gravitating around 60 liras for large ones compared to the 122 liras of the ²⁴ The 21st galleys for Cyprus and the over 170 of those for Alexandria and Beirut. May 1366 five galleys left for Romania, landing in Tana and headed Trebizond. ²⁵ In the meantime, the power that would soon become the great protagonist of Mediterranean —

and Middle Eastern politics, the Ottoman Empire, was establishing itself. Having arisen from one of the many small Turkish emirates following the division of the Seljuk empire caused by the Mongol conquest (mid-13th century), the Ottomans quickly controlled western Anatolia, coming to closely threaten the Byzantine empire. In 1354 they effectively entered Europe after conquering Gallipoli, continued their advance into Thrace, and in 1366 (or 1369) conquered Adrianople (Edirne).

²⁶ Venice considered Ottoman expansion in the Balkans a threat to navigation in the Aegean, and to counter it attempted to create a broad anti-Turkish alliance that included Byzantium, the kingdoms of Bulgaria and Cyprus and the Hospitallers of Rhodes.

The diplomatic initiative, in which Venice played a leading role, led to the crusade led by Amadeus of Savoy in 1366, and to the recovery of Gallipoli and other recent Ottoman conquests.

²⁷ The coalition's successes weakened the young state of Murad I (r. 1362–1389) for a few years, but it was a temporary victory that would not stop Ottoman expansion.

Although relations with the empire of Trebizond had been re-established and the Ottomans were hit hard by the crusade, the trade routes were still not completely secure, to the point that in 1368 the senate ordered the consul of Tana to send 200 princes to the bailo of Trebizond, allocated by Venice to fortify the settlement. In the same year and the following year, the galleys headed towards Romania and the Black Sea decreased: if in 1368 from six they became five, in 1369 of the five planned only four were awarded, demonstrating the persistent state of insecurity. Although the Anatolian region and the caravan routes that crossed it had also now become unsafe, Venice did not completely abandon the idea of maintaining contact with Tabriz.

We have seen how, after the collapse of the dynasty founded by Hülegü, the Ilkhanate was fragmented into many emirates. Among these, the largest and most influential was that of the Jalairids, a local dynasty founded by Emir Uwais (r. 28 who, as commander of the Mongol troops 'Azerbaijan, in Azerbaijan, 1356-1374) had occupied a vast region that included Tabriz, I parts of Iraq, including Baghdad, and some regions of western Iran. In May 1369 Uwais had written to the Venetian bailo of Trebizond, asking that "all Venetian merchants from Trapezonda and the other merchants" return to Tabriz on 22 August, with a guarantee of protection and reduction of taxes . bailo responded by saying he was ready to resume relations, as a large caravana») had been stopped in Trabzon for two years waiting to be able to caravan («magna leave for Tabriz, but had not been able to move because there were no 30 31 Instability in the Golden Horde, and the growing security situation. shift of commercial flows towards the ports of Alexandria and Beirut, probably encouraged Venice to accept the emir's proposal who, evidently, provided promises. At the end of 1371 sufficient reassurances. Uwais however was unable to fulfill such the first news of robberies suffered by Venetian merchants in Iran reached Venice, and the bailo of Trebizond Francesco Giustiniani in November 1372 decided to seize the goods of merchants coming from Tabriz as compensation, putting an end to further attempts to trade in the territory of the former Ilkhanate. 32

2. Venice between Mamai and the rise of Toqtamys

Mamai, the Russians and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Since the 1960s, the regional political expressions subjected for decades to Mongol domination leveraged the division and therefore the weakening of the Horde to free themselves from it and supplant it. The protagonists of this transition were the Grand Duke of Moscow Dmitry Ivanovich (1350-1389), Prince of Vladimir from 1363, Mikhail, Prince of Tver' (r. 1368-1382), and the Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas (r. 1345-1377). Lithuania had managed to expand to the detriment of the most exposed Russian principalities, the south-western ones, during the years of the conflict between Nogai and Toqta, that is, in a period during which the Mongols had not been able, due to internal struggles, to intervene in defense of their allies.

In the 1420s the Baltic Grand Duchy had conquered Kiev, subsequently lost, and twenty years later Galicia and Volynia.

With the end of Mongol hegemony the Grand Duke of Lithuania continued to

expand, aiming towards the Black Sea and its attractive commercial network. In 1362 Algirdas' army occupied Chernigov and Perjaslavl until reaching Moscow and at the end of the year attacked the rich region of Podolia, which was the gateway to Pontus. Podolia was under the protection of Mamaï and the clash was inevitable. In the winter of 1362-1363 the two armies faced each other near the Synjucha River in what the chronicles refer to as *the Battle of the Blue Waters*, and the Mongols were defeated.

³³ The victory guaranteed the Lithuanians control of Kiev and Podolia, but the time was not ripe to free Mamaï.

Inserting himself into the internal struggles of the Russian principalities, Algirdas had supported Mikhail of Tver from the beginning against Dmitry of Moscow, who was in turn a vassal of Mamaï, who was thus dragged into the Russo-Lithuanian conflict. For his part, Mamaï proved to be pragmatic and, changing sides, opposed Dmitrij Ivanovich who constituted a much more concrete threat to the Mongol authority thanks to Moscow's strategic position. Mamaï therefore supported the Lithuanian aims, offering the Baltic state recognition of the conquered lands in exchange for loyalty. Algirdas, for his part, secured a privileged position among the khan's vassals, which increased his political stature.³⁴

Mamaï had achieved what he wanted, but at the beginning of the following decade his relations with the Russian princes degenerated. Taking advantage of the weakness within the imperial clan, Dmitry had stopped paying taxes and tributes (or not paying enough). Mamaï, in response, declared him lapsed and granted the principality of Moscow to Mikhail of Tver. To avoid the clash Dmitrij paid homage to Mamaï by bringing him gifts and the money from unpaid tributes. But it was an artificial peace, destined to end soon. Dmitry's ambitions were in open contrast to Mamaï's hegemonic aims because if the Grand Duchy of Moscow had continued to expand, it would have become an inconvenient antagonist for the Mongolian emir.

It was the anti-Mongol revolts in various Russian cities, perhaps spontaneous, this balance. he arrested and executed the ~~that~~ demonstrated the fragility of tax collectors sent by Mamaï to collect the taxes. The protest spread to other cities, and Mongolian troops sent to Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow were repelled. A long conflict ensued. In 1376 the Russians attacked Kazan, south-east of Moscow, where a modest Tatar garrison was located. For the first time it was the Russians who were chasing the Mongols. Dmitry's forces intercepted and defeated the enemy army along the Vozha River in August 1378.

³⁶ On September 8 two years later, in 1380, in the Kulikovo plain, at the confluence of the Don and the Nepradva, the Russian army defeated

the Tartars again, in an epic battle that earned Dmitry the nickname Donskoy (of the Don). ³⁷

The Russian victories did not definitively free themselves from the "Tatar yoke", as the principality remained formally subject to Saraj, but they changed the political balance. First, the Russian show of force nipped Lithuanian ambitions over Moscow in its tracks, limiting Baltic influence to the Podolia region (map 2, in this chapter).

³⁸ Secondly, Mamaï emerged weakened, and therefore both the Mongolian aristocracy and his commercial partners, the Genoese and Venetians, no longer considered him a reliable interlocutor. Finally, Mamaï's defeat demonstrated that to keep trade flows active it was necessary to invest in relations with local authorities. For example, at the end of the 1360s in Tana Mamaï demanded a 4% tax on sales from the Venetians, while the Genoese paid 3%. To remedy this disparity, on 3 June 1369 the senate decided to send an embassy to the emir, led by the consul of Tana, with gifts worth 100 silver sums.

³⁹ We do not know if the mission was successful, but a decade later the picture had changed and rather than sending expensive diplomatic delegations to Saraj, Venice preferred to consolidate relations with the local aristocracy.

Venice and the Blue Horde

If since 1361 the internal divisions of the western horde had been at least partly attenuated thanks to Mamaï's authority, the situation in the east was different.

The Blue Horde, whose political center was the city of Sighnaq (in modern-day Kazakhstan), drew its resources from the rich agricultural and urban economy of the Volga region. From 1360 it was ruled by Qara Nogay (d. ca. 1364), descendant of Toqa Timür, younger son of Jochi and elected thanks to the support

of the Mongolian nobility. ⁴⁰ His cousin, Urus (d. 1377), ascended the throne in 1362, ⁴¹ while Mamaï was expanding to the east and Kidyr, the khan who had shortly before dethroned Nawruz, sat on the throne of Saraj. ⁴²

The Blue Horde had already acquired a politically autonomous character towards Saraj, most likely, already during the Uzbek khanate, or when Mubarak Khwaja (r. 1320-1344) dominated in Sighnaq and beat ⁴³ Uzbek's successor, Janibeg, it was its own currency as early over the Blue Horde and in 1344 had as 1327-28. intervened to re-establish his authority placed Sighnaq Chimtay (r. 1344-1360), son of Mubarak Khwaja, on the throne.

Upon the death of Chimtay, Urus (or Muhammad Urus, d. 1377) came to power and entered into open conflict with Mamaï. The expansionist policy of Urus had

success and managed to replace Mamaï's influence on various cities, among which the most important were Astrakhan and the capital Saraj itself, both of which fell in 1375. Such and many events could not fail to have direct repercussions on the activity of the Venetians in Tana .

Until 1376, navigation to the Sea of Azov had been smooth. Every ⁴⁴ Ma

year the galleys of Romania had been armed according to the usual itinerary. starting from—
1376 the journeys were interrupted for almost a decade in conjunction with the worsening of the political situation. ⁴⁵

In these years the senate allowed galley captains to stay for a few more days in the Black Sea ports.

From 1365 to 1373 the galleys of România could stop in Tana for no more than 7-8 days, in 1374 and 1375 they were authorized to stop for 12 days, and in the two-year period 1386-88 the stop was allowed for over 14 days. ⁴⁶

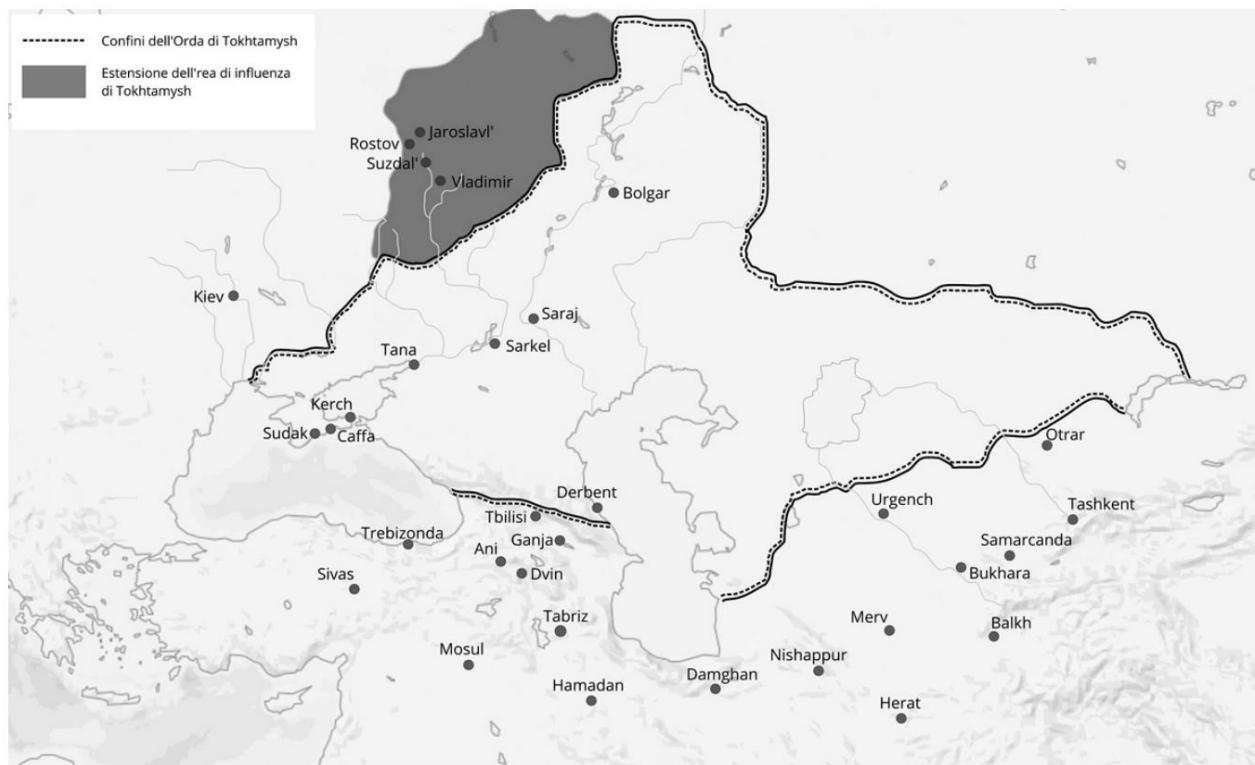
The crisis situation that affected the Sea of Azov basin throughout the 1970s also forced Venice to increase its costs to defend Tana. In July 1370 the Senate established the *provisions* to be communicated to the consul, which included the supply of weapons and money to repair the lodge (*lobia*) in which the notaries worked and restore the fortifications. The consul also received 36 sums to pay for a fixed-service interpreter. ⁴⁷ In April 1374 the Senate ordered the consul to consult with his government, the Council of the Twelve, to consider the possibility of purchasing land separate from the Genoese neighborhood ("apart from Januensium") and possibly fortifying it. ⁴⁸ The response of the *noyon* of Tana was positive, since the land was actually purchased and fortified, but a few months later the consul had to communicate that the Genoese had not accepted the expansion of the settlement and were threatening retaliation, confirming once again the chronic inability of the two communities to coexist.

Toqtamysh

The continuous power struggles between rival branches of the imperial clan and the defeats suffered in the decade 1370-1380 forced Mamaï to retreat, facilitating the advance, from the east, of the Blue Horde, whose leadership was anything but solid. In 1376 a violent struggle broke out within the top ranks of the aristocracy. At this juncture emerged Toqtamysh, a young commander, son of Tuli Kwhadja (Toy Khoja), a high court official.

⁴⁹ The conquest of the Golden Horde, promoted by Urus in 1374 and discussed at the *quriltai* of his settlement, had been opposed by part of the aristocracy, including Toqtamysh's father, who was therefore executed on Urus's orders same. ⁵⁰

Toqtamysh was born perhaps in 1342 and could claim rights of dynastic legitimacy as he was directly descended from the Jochid clan on his father's side and was a Qonggirat on his mother's side. ⁵¹ After seeing his father murdered on his uncle's orders, he developed a deep hostility towards Urus which however he could not yet openly challenge. The young emir spent years gathering resources by attacking villages and plundering the countryside. Urus soon understood that his nephew was a threat to him as he called into question his personal prestige and therefore his authority. Perhaps hunted by the enemy or for a strategic calculation, Toqtamysh took refuge in Samarkand in 1376, already under the control of the young Timur (Tamerlane), on whom we will focus later. Timur controlled Transoxiana (west of the Syr Darya) and viewed the expansion of Urus' Blue Horde with serious apprehension. Toqtamysh's arrival presented an opportunity to slow Urus' advance. ⁵² Timur therefore took him under his protection and assigned him resources, lands and government responsibilities, particularly in Otrar, not far from Urus' capital, Sighnaq. ⁵³



Map 1. The Golden Horde after the assertion of Toqtamysh

Military fortunes turned in favor of Toqtamysh, who took Sighnaq, ⁵⁴ Having late 1377 or early 1378. in the Blue Horde, he found seized power probably in himself directly confronting Mamaï, who in the meantime was

committed to maintaining control over Russia and Lithuania.⁵⁵ The political project of Toqtamysh was the reunification and reconstitution of the Jochi khanate, and to this end he sought and obtained the support of much of the regional aristocracy, who handed over the khanate's capital Saraj to him in 1380.

In October 1380 the two armies clashed on the Kalka River, already the scene of the historic battle between the Mongols and the Russo-Cuman forces over a century and a half earlier. Mamaï's army was annihilated. The defeat caused the first defections in the ranks of the aristocracy loyal to Mamaï, who took refuge in Caffa, a city formally on his territory, to reorganize. However, a few days later he was killed in unclear circumstances by the Genoese. The *begs* of the White Horde had long since turned their backs on Mamaï, certain that he would lose the war against their rival. It is probable that the *beg* of Solgat himself asked the [Genoese](#) to get rid of Mamaï.

At the beginning of the new decade it therefore seemed that Toqtamysh was succeeding where Mamaï had failed, namely in the reunification of the ulus Jochide. In a few months, and with the support of most of the local emirs, he conquered Astrakhan, the Volga region, the North Caucasus and the Crimea.

For the first time in over twenty years a coherent power had once again become hegemonic on both banks of the Volga. For his part, Timur maintained control over Transoxiana.

3. Venice, Genoa and the Chioggia war

The state of war, the involvement of the territorial nobility and the process of political adjustment in the Golden Horde had immediate consequences on Venetian policy in the Black Sea, not only in the north, where the clashes had more direct consequences, but also in the south, where the political framework was in full evolution. Starting from 1375, relations between Venice and the empire of Trebizond were back in crisis. The reasons for the clash were ancient: the Venetian merchants were victims of continuous harassment by the local population.

Emperor Alexios III did not defend them, and moreover he had contracted debts with the Venetian mercantile community that he did not intend (or could not) pay. As if that wasn't enough, he had reduced their privileges. In a situation of growing pressure in Tana and the consequent need to consolidate its presence in Trebizond, Venice could not fail to react and did everything to overthrow the inconvenient emperor. Marco Giustiniani, an expert admiral, was tasked with taking ten armed galleys to Constantinople and then, with six of them, in front of Trebizond with the aim of intimidating the emperor and forcing him to

57 deal. — Venice's show of strength was successful and led to an agreement, signed in July 1376, which recognized the authority of Alexios in exchange for a commitment to guarantee the safety of mercantile activity and a drastic reduction - half - of tax obligations on all transactions, except for the entry duty of goods.

[58](#)

The tensions that characterized the Black Sea in this phase and the consequent slowdown of commercial traffic throughout the region had repercussions on the enchantments, the scale of which collapsed in the years 1374-1376. [59](#) Tana and Trebizond were the two focal points of the Venetian pontine system. As had always happened in the past, external difficulties generated extreme reactions in Venetian-Genoese relations, in one direction or another. In 1376 the Venetian galleys of România had to be escorted to Tana by the armed ships of Marco Giustiniani, who then awaited their return to Constantinople. Precisely in these months - September-October - the *casus belli* was being created that would cause the fourth conflict between the two cities: the war of Chioggia. Its origins were the dispute for control of the small and strategic island of Tenedos, in the north-eastern Aegean and south of the Chersonnesus. But the real reason once again lay in the competition to dominate the Black Sea trade. The facts are linked to the tangle of relations between the states present in the eastern sector of the Mediterranean.

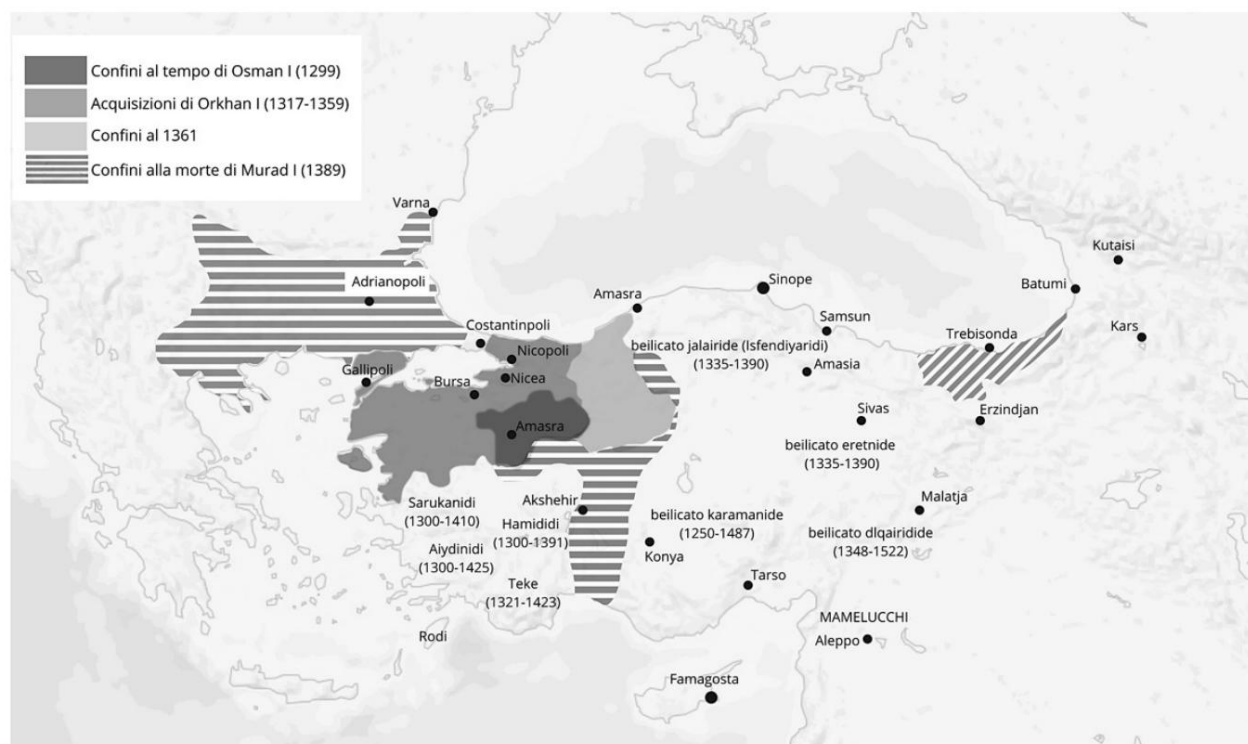
In 1369, a few years after the anti-Venetian revolt in Crete, the Byzantine emperor, a weakened John V Palaeologus (d. 1391), had granted the island of Tenedos to Venice to pay at least in part the enormous debt it had contract. Tenedos, thanks to its strategic position, allowed Venice to control the Hellespont, and therefore transit to and from Constantinople. Genoa could not fail to react and took action to reverse the situation by taking advantage of the crisis in Byzantium. Emperor John V Palaeologus was under attack on the external front, with the Ottomans having already taken Gallipoli and controlling the Dardanelles, and at court where his son and heir to the throne Andronicus IV had long been trying to get rid of his father. In 1376 the situation worsened when Andronicus IV, aided (perhaps even pushed) by the Genoese of Pera, imprisoned his father and formally gave Tenedos to his allies, which meant expelling the Venetians who in the meantime were fortifying the island. [60](#) The Venetian-Genoese war that resulted was the last major conflict between the two cities, perhaps the most difficult for both. This time the conflict was global and the extent and depth of Genoese and Venetian interests in the East —

involved most of the neighboring states. King Louis I of Hungary allied himself with Genoa to consolidate his dominions in Dalmatia, thus cutting off the

supplies of wood for Venice. The patriarch of Aquileia also sided with Genoa, as did the Da Carrara lordship of Padua, which had already been at war against Venice for some time. The Byzantine Empire, as already mentioned, entered the conflict due to dynastic struggles. For their part, the Ottomans, now involved in the politics of the region, took up the defense of Genoa. Venice, in a condition of growing isolation, thus found itself facing a test with an outcome that was more uncertain than ever.

Most of the military operations took place in the western Mediterranean, but there was no shortage of battles in the Romanian seas, in particular off the coast of the island of Tenedos. During the conflict, navigation in the Black Sea was almost completely interrupted, causing enormous economic damage to both Genoa and Venice. In June 1377, when the galleys of Romania were awarded in Rialto, only three were armed, of which only two found a buyer and in the end, on 7 August, the Senate decided not to send them off because it was too risky. ⁶¹ The Peace of Turin, reached in August 1381, was the confirmation of what was already abundantly clear: neither Genoa nor Venice were able to cancel the other's —

presence in the Levant. The treaty confirmed the state of compromise that had allowed the two republics to coexist until then. Above all, the Ottoman Empire of Murad I, a rising power, which had taken western Anatolia from Byzantium and entered the Balkans on a permanent basis, benefited from the Chioggia war.



Map 2. Ottoman expansion between 1300 and 1389

For their part, Genoa and Venice established that for two years Tana would be **excluded** from however reaching the mouth of the **navigation**. Venetian state went to the Black Sea without

Don. Only in 1383 did trips to Tana resume regularly and on 24 July the Doge Antonio Venier (d. 1400) sent two ambassadors to the Tatar governor of Crimea («*excellentissimum dominum Imperatorem Tartarorum*») to ask for confirmation of the agreements in force. Evidently there was a fear that taxes on trade would be increased. The diplomats had to ensure that the *commerchium* remained at 3%, and if this was not possible, set it at a **maximum** of 5%.

— After the Peace of Turin Tana experienced another short period of prosperity which lasted until the mid-1390s. The voyages were regular and the charms show that there was a keen interest in the trade. But the internal conflicts of the Golden Horde had not subsided with Toqtamysh's victory over Mamaï. A new conflict would soon upset the political balance, once again overturning the balance of power and forcing Venice to take action.

4. The war between Toqtamysh and Timur

Timur was born in April 1336 in Kesh, a city south of Samarkand, to Taragai, head of the nomadic *Barlas clan*, Turkicized Mongols who converted to Islam, and Takina Khatun, about whom very little is known, but perhaps also an indirect descendant of the Chinggiside clan.

⁶⁵ At a very young age he placed himself in the service of the emir Qara'una Qazaghan (d. 1358), undisputed lord of Transoxiana. ⁶⁶ He knew how to exploit the opportunity and attracted the benevolence of Qazaghan, who entrusted him with ever greater military responsibilities, but in 1358 the powerful emir of Transoxiana ended up killed in a conspiracy organized by his son and a year and a half later the Qara'una had to face the the offensive of the legitimate pretenders to the throne ⁶⁷ that Chagadaide, the Mongols of the Moghulisan of Toghluk Timur (d. 1363), governed the eastern part of the khanate, for — decades in open conflict with the hegemonic power of Transoxiana. Much of the aristocracy that controlled the clans and tribes of the region allied themselves with Toghluk Timur, facilitating his advance.

The young Tamerlane also chose this option and welcomed the enemy army without resisting. Indeed, he went to meet them with gifts and offered to collaborate with them.

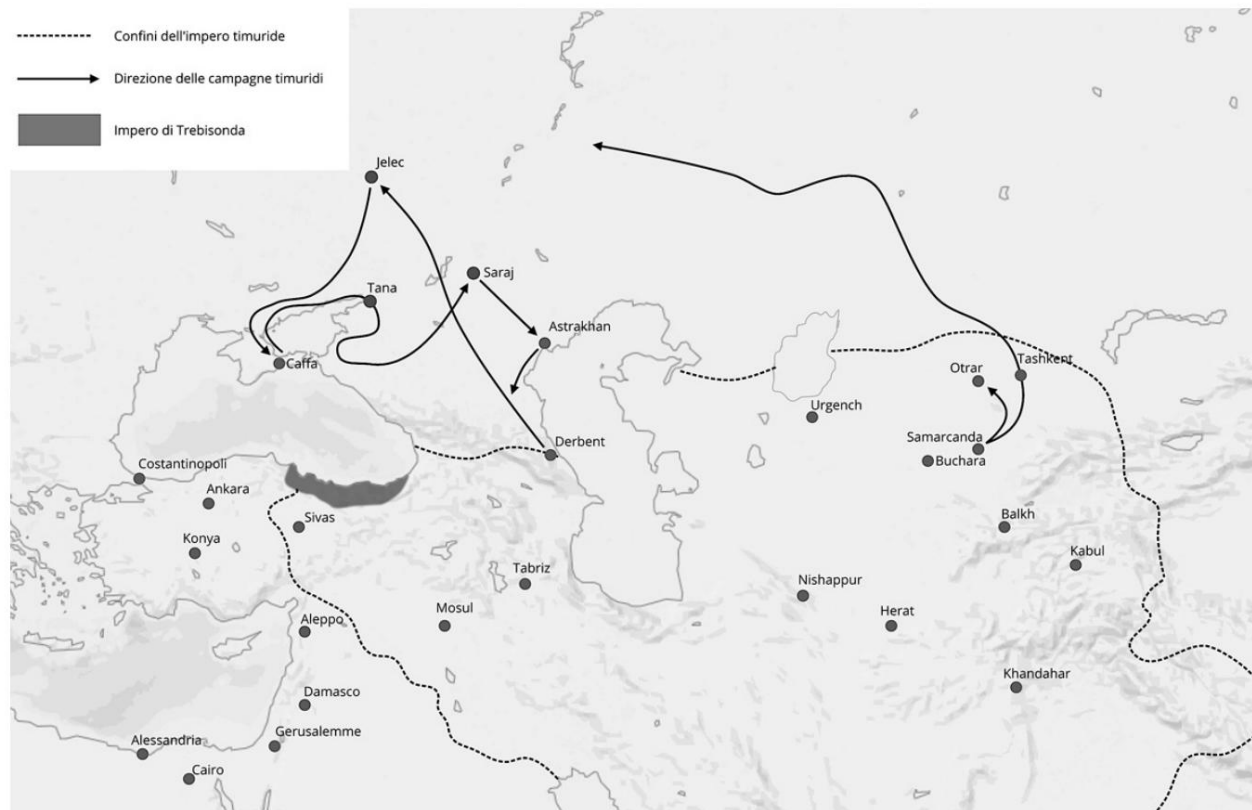
The strategy of the young Timur – he was then only 25 years old – was successful to the point that Toghluk Timur entrusted him with the defense of Transoxiana and an entire *tümen*. But the conquest of such a large area, inhabited by very different clans and tribes, could not be definitive. The population, perhaps oppressed by a predatory government, openly rebelled when, in 1361, Toghluk Timur returned to repress the outbreaks of revolt. Timur then chose to join the rebels against the Chagadaids, although they had supported him. It was certainly a difficult and risky choice. At the time Timur could count on a handful of loyalists and the support of a small part of the warrior nobility of Transoxiana. The future Great Emir then began his escape, pursued by Toghluk Timur's men, who wanted to punish the betrayal in an exemplary way.

But in 1363 the khan died and was succeeded by his son, Iljas Khoja (d. 1368), who continued the search for Timur and his fleeing loyalists in the Nishappur region.

Iljas Khoja feared that Timur, who in the meantime had joined his brother-in-law Hussayn (his sister was Timur's wife), could regroup the forces of Transoxiana, and lead to a new division of the state that his father had reunified. Meanwhile Timur and Hussayn had gained fame among the population and troops, probably serving as officials in internal disputes in the more remote regions of Transoxiana. When Khoja's Chagadaid army first encountered Timur and Hussayn's forces, they already had thousands of men. The first clash occurred in 1363 BC

what sources call the battle of “the stone bridge” (*Pul-i Sengi*) – probably a bridge over the Wakhs River – in which the Chagadaid army was severely defeated. It was only the first of the many military successes of Timur, who was already crippled in his right leg by a wound caused by an arrow and poorly treated. In the spring of 1365 the two armies clashed again near Tashkent, on the upper course of the Syr Darya. This time, although there are no details on how the battle took place, Ilyas Khoja prevailed and the Timurid army had to retreat towards Samarkand. The Chagadaid forces then besieged the city, but the initiative failed miserably, perhaps also due to a virulent explosion of equine influenza that decimated the besiegers' horses. It was the final blow for the khan, who had to abandon the project of bringing Transoxiana back under Chagadaid control. For Timur it was the beginning of a meteoric rise, but the time had come to settle relations with his brother-in-law, who had become a cumbersome presence for his ambitions.

The showdown between the two, who had fought side by side for years against the common enemy, took place in Balkh, where Hussayn had taken refuge, at the beginning of 1368. The city surrendered and Timur spared the life of his brother-in-law, who however was murdered under mysterious circumstances a few months later. Timur no longer had any obstacles before him and in April 1370 he was proclaimed Great Emir, undisputed ruler of all of Transoxiana. He chose Samarkand as his capital, a city with a glorious past, geographically well located in the Zaresfhan valley and halfway between Bukhara and Tashkent. From here Timur organized the new state: he fortified the city, eliminated the nobility he deemed hostile, granted power only to those he trusted, and reformed the administrative machine, focusing on trade as the main resource. In this regard, he initiated a vast reform to standardize weights and measures, invested in the safety of the caravan routes, and ensured that the tribes settled close to the oases did not rob traveling merchants. For some years he avoided any form of conflict, aware of having to concentrate on internal stabilization and building an efficient army.



Map 3. Tamerlane's campaigns against Toqtamysh (1388-1391 and 1395)

From 1371 Timur launched a series of military campaigns which soon led him to considerably expand his already vast territory. The first initiatives were directed inward, to reduce the rebellious tribes of Transoxiana to obedience. In 1372 he attacked Khwarezmia, which resisted for years. In 1379 he laid siege to Urganj, and after having defeated the city's resistance he completed the conquest of Khwarezmia. After Khwarezmia it was the turn of Khorasan, an obligatory stop on the way to Azerbaijan, which in turn is the gateway to the Caucasus. The Timurid campaign in Khorasan was challenging and long, but ended in 1385, after which Timur planned the attack on the Iranian Jalairids.

It was in that context that the break with Toqtamysh matured who, having defeated Mamaï and taken control over almost all the territory that had been the Ulus Jochi at the time of its maximum expansion, hastened to reaffirm his authority over the Russian princes and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Coherent government also meant administrative and fiscal reform. Toqtamysh soon sent his officials to the Russian prince Dmitry of Moscow and the Grand Duke of Lithuania.

Both had accepted formal submission to the khan, but Toqtamysh had long planned to bring all the Russian principalities under his control

direct, a state of vassalage that is not only formal but substantial, with all the fiscal obligations connected to it. For his part, the Muscovite prince aspired to a state of greater independence and refused to pay any tribute.

Thus it was that in August 1382 the Mongol army, assisted by the princes of Nizhny Novgorod and Ryazan, besieged Moscow which fell after a strenuous defense.

A huge massacre ensued. The victory of Kulikovo and the dream of Russian independence were thus cancelled.

Thus, in these years, both Toqtamysh and Timur had become established leaders. Both had efficient armies and huge resources and would soon clash. A clue to the nature of the rivalry between the two comes from numismatics, since in 1383 Toqtamysh minted money in Khwarezmia, recently under Timurid control. It was a clear challenge to the Great One's authority Emir.

In 1385 Timur attacked the Jalairids to occupy the southern Caucasus, but despite having won some battles he retreated without completing the conquest, perhaps due to the death of a daughter. Toqtamysh took the opportunity to attack Tabriz, perhaps in late 1384 or early the following year. The city fell in the winter of 1385. Toqtamysh also established diplomatic relations with the 68 Mamluks by sending an embassy to Cairo in early 1385.

The two khans would soon collide. The first clash between Toqtamysh and Timur occurred in Dagestan in 1386-1387 and ended without a winner. The following year Toqtamysh attacked in Khwarezmia and won some battles against Timurid troops near Otrar and Bukhara, plundered the countryside and villages of the districts, but failed to take the urban centers.

Timur, in those months, was in Iran. The counter-offensive, this time directly against Toqtamysh, started from Urgench, which was overwhelmed by the Timurid armies in the freezing winter of 1388. Even in this circumstance Timur preferred to stall and returned to Samarkand rather than pursue the routed Toqtamysh forces. In the spring of 1389, having recruited a large force, Timur crossed the Syr Darya and entered the steppes to liquidate the rival khan once and for all.

The campaign was long and exhausting and according to some sources Timur himself fell ill with malaria. At the beginning of April, some deserters from Toqtamysh's army were intercepted near the Ural River, thanks to which Timur was able to identify where the bulk of the enemy forces were located, camped a few kilometers away near the modern city of Orenburg. It was here, on the course of the Kondurcha river, in the Volga basin, that the two armies faced each other in the first real battle. Timur prevailed, but it was not a decisive victory because he was in enemy territory, and without logistical support. Toqtamysh,

for his part, he was defeated but not defeated. [69](#)

In the following three years Toqtamysh was able to reorganize himself and turned to local lords, from *begs* to tribal chiefs, who could guarantee him support, but above all he sought an alliance with the Mamluks and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He also had the support of Moscow, which he had besieged and conquered only a few years earlier. Grand Duke Vasily (d. 1425), son and successor of Dmitry Donskoj, certainly had not forgotten the atrocities perpetrated in 1382 by Toqtamysh's army, but on this occasion he considered it advantageous to support him. In fact, accepting the bond of vassalage meant immediately obtaining control of Nizhny Novgorod, Gorodec and Murom, the great plains east of Moscow up to the middle course of the Volga.

Furthermore, immediately after defeating Toqtamysh, Timur had to intervene in Azerbaijan and Iran to repress the rebellions caused almost everywhere by local clan leaders who did not want to submit. The military campaign, known as the Five Years' War, was long and spread over a vast territory. Beginning in the summer of 1392, operations were concentrated in Luristan, and in the spring of the following year Timur was able to conquer Shiraz, and a few weeks later he besieged and took Isfahan and Hamadan. In August the Timurid army entered Baghdad, then in the hands of Ahmed Jalair (d. 1410), the Jalairide emir driven out of Tabriz during the Toqtamysh raid of 1382.

Once again Ahmed managed to escape before Timur's army entered the city. [70](#) The operations concluded in the —

Caucasus, with the capture of the kingdom of Georgia, towards the end of 1394. After years of war Timur had effectively reconstituted a semblance of the Ilkhanate, which was added to Transoxiana, now almost entirely under his control. But just as Timur was in the Caucasus Toqtamysh broke out with his forces into Shirvan, passed Derbent and arrived within a few kilometers of where the bulk of the Timurid forces were stationed. The clash between the two armies became inevitable, but Toqtamysh retreated instead of advancing. The reasons for this choice are not clarified by the sources, but it is probable that the khan was counting on support from the local populations which in reality was lacking. In the first months of 1395 Toqtamysh settled in the plains along the Terek River, not far from the western coast of the Caspian Sea, while Timur crossed the Caucasus, and in April he encountered Toqtamysh's army, still deployed in the Terek valley .

The clash took place on 15 April 1395 and was an epochal battle. Timur risked dying in combat, but the final outcome was all in his favor, to the point that Toqtamysh's troops were forced to retreat in a confused and

messy. Launched in pursuit, the Timurid army broke into what remained of the Golden Horde. Timur conquered Bolghar, devastated the countryside of the Kiev district and then turned south, heading towards the Sea of Azov, where he hoped to find Toqtamysh, who in reality had managed to take refuge with the Grand Duke of Lithuania, counting on being able to reorganize himself.

5. *The Timurid attack on Tana*

The political instability of the region between the late 1270s and early 1280s had directly affected Tana's life. The khanate of Toqtamysh (1280-1295) had re-established a certain political order and had favored the resumption of the voyages of the Venetian galleys towards the Sea of Azov, and an albeit fragile economic revival. But the centralizing policy that Toqtamysh had pursued in the Golden Horde was incompatible with the autonomy achieved by the Latin settlements in Gazaria. The khan had attempted to bring Crimea back under his control between 1285 and 1286. From the city of Solgat the Mongols had moved on the richest and most independent city in the region, namely Caffa.

Diplomacy went to work to avoid the siege, but every attempt failed. On 31 May 1287 the Genoese doge Antoniotto Adorno wrote to his Venetian counterpart Antonio Venier announcing that all attempts to find a compromise with the Mongols had failed. ⁷¹ Genoa committed itself to fighting "the barbarians", but demanded that Venice prevent its merchants from having relations of any kind with the enemy. The Ligurian city would have interrupted economic relations with the Mongols and asked Venice to do the same. In practice, a picture similar to that of the 1240s was emerging, when the war with Janibeg had forced the two cities to form a common front.

To compensate for the potential damage due to the interruption of Venetian-Mongolian relations, Genoa undertook to guarantee the maximum openness of all its settlements on the Black Sea to Venetian citizens. ⁷²

Furthermore, Genoa ordered its authorities on the Black Sea to treat the Venetians as friends. ⁷³

⁷³ In those same weeks Ludovico Contarini, Venetian consul in Tana, and the captain of the galleys of Romania, received orders from the motherland not to welcome "Saracens and Tartars" on board.

— Genoa managed to repel the Mongol attack and was guaranteed a few years of peace before Timur's arrival. ⁷⁵

The conflict between Toqtamysh and Timur caused a slowdown in the voyages of the Venetian galleys, but never completely stopped navigation towards the Sea of Azov. By the early summer of 1294 the war was approaching the Latin settlements. In a resolution dated June 4th the Senate left the captain of the

galleys freedom to get to Tana only after having assessed whether the situation. In case of danger he [76](#) allowed. — could decide to stop at Caffa. On 23 July 1395 it was explicitly recommended that ships enter the port of Tana only after having gathered information from the consul on the situation. The Venetian fears came true a few months later and in the second half of the year Tamerlane attacked Tana. Perhaps this was part of a larger strategy by which Timur intended to destroy the trade centers that fed the Jochid treasury. In any case, the material damage and human losses were enormous for all the communities living in Tana.

The blow dealt was too hard to absorb in the short term. Genoese and Venetians had to flee from Tana, but they were not systematically expelled as had happened in 1308 and 1343. Timur's incursion was destructive but short-lived and ended with the withdrawal of the troops. The consequences of the attack were mostly indirect. The war in Central Asia had made the routes north of the Caspian Sea, from Urgench and Astrakhan, unsafe, and so imports were slowed down. If Timur's expansion did not cause a breakdown in communications, it certainly [reduced](#) mercantile activities.

When news of the attack reached Venice, the authorities reacted immediately. On February 22, 1396, the Senate ordered the new consul of Tana, Blanco de Ripa, to go to Toqtamys (Tokhan) to ask him for permission to

fortify the settlement, severely damaged by Timur (Zamberlanus). [78](#)

The auctions of the galleys for the voyage to Romania-Black Sea sold in the spring of 1396 were reduced to just over 20 lire compared to over 100 the year before. At the same time, those for the galleys of Alexandria and Beirut rose steadily, a clear sign of a progressive shift of the Venetian commercial axis towards the Mediterranean. [79](#) Furthermore, a resolution dated 13 July 1396 recommended great prudence to the *patrons* of the galleys for the voyage to Tana, who had to inquire with the bailiff of Constantinople about the situation before proceeding beyond the straits. If the danger was too great they had to head for Caffa and then gain Trebizond. [80](#) In the same year, the ambassador to Trebizond Jacopo Gussoni - who was also the bailiff of the Venetian community - obtained from the emperor Manuel III (1364-1417) the right to trade under the same conditions established by the treaty signed by Alexios III, to hold a church and a bench in the city, and to administer justice in the name and on behalf of Venice for the crimes committed by his fellow countrymen. [81](#)

Despite the diminished security of Asian communication routes, the commercial outpost on the Sea of Azov was too important for Venice to

would give it up. The senate decided to send an ambassador to Tana in 1397, soon after Timur's departure. Andrea Giustiniani was appointed, with the task of asking Toqtamış to renew the privileges in force, since all the documents had been destroyed during the looting.

⁸² It also had to ask for further commercial benefits due to the heavy damage suffered and the ⁸³ Evidently the Venetian neighbourhood. it was successful because already an embassy possibility of fortifying the in June 1397 the auctions for the Romània-Black Sea galleys were auctioned and there is express mention of the journey to Tana. ⁸⁴

In the years immediately following, trade with Tana resumed albeit slowly. In January 1399 it was decided to send two cocas, ships suitable for heavy cargo, which were granted a stop of several weeks on the condition of leaving by 15 September. The considerable capacity of the ships, over 500 barrels, suggests a large load. On that occasion, a new consul was sent to Tana, ⁸⁵ In June of the same year, Maffeo Barbarigo. two galleys from Romània-Black Sea that were and the auctions, albeit slowly, went up: one galley was sold obtained authorization to go to Tana sold for 103 lire and 14 big money and the other for 101 lire and 5 big money.

⁸⁶

Despite Timur's attack, at the end of the fourteenth century the Sea of Azov was still a popular destination, but the most significant flow of trade with Asia had now moved southwards and Middle Eastern and North African ports were progressively supplanting those of the Sea Black. Having taken note of the new international framework, Venice adapted by intensifying its diplomatic and financial efforts in the Aegean and Egypt. The Black Sea was not abandoned by Venice, but the prosperity of the previous century would never be achieved again.

1. Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde*, p. 116; Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 268-272.

2. Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, p. 227; see also Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 262-263 and 267.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

4. *Ibid*; Sabitov, *Emiry Uzbek-Chana*, pp. 128-129.

5. Russian sources describe Kidyr as *oglan*, or crown prince of the Blue Horde. In fact Kidyr was the son of khan Sasi Buqa (r. 1313-1321). Kidyr was legitimately a Jochid as he was of Shaybanid origins, that is, a descendant of Shāybān (d. 1266), fifth son of Jochi.

6. He received in Saraj Dmitrij Ivanovich grand duke of Moscow, that of Vladimir' Andrej Konstantinovič, that of Nizhny Novgorod, those of Rostov and Yaroslavl'. Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 229-230; also Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 270-271.

7. According to Russian sources from August to September 1361. There are coins minted by him in Saraj in that same year. Grigor'ev, *Zolotoordynskie chany*.

8. On Mamaï see the controversial but still original Gumilev, *Drevnjaja Rus' i Velikaja step'*, in particular pp. 422-450 and to follow the chapter on the White Horde (čyčyčy čyčyčy); Trepavlov, *Gosudarstvennyj stroj Mongol'skoj imperii*, pp. 62-67; Krivosheev, *Rus' i Mongoly*. We have news of Mamaï in Caffa from the Massaria di Caffa of 1374 (Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 457). See also Prochorov, *Etničeskaja integracija*, pp. 5-43.

9. Tulumbek had Qyiat origins, i.e. the khan Borjigid (Borjigin) from whom he himself descended

Chinggis. Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 44-45.

[10.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, n. 169, pp. 307-308.

[11.](#) «Pro honoranda persona novi imperatoris Tartarorum et pro obtinenda franchitate, libertate et pactis nostri [...] elligantur in maiori consilio due solempnes ambaxatores». ASV, SM, XXIX, f. 49; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIX, p. 228; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, I, n. 358, p. 95.

[12.](#) «To live and have peace and quiet and good fraternity with charity and sincere love, and abstinere a rixis et brigis quibuscumque invicem inferendis»: *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, n. 37, pp. 66-68 and n. 38, pp. 68-70.

[13.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, nos. 227 and 228, p. 318.

[14.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, n. 38, p. 68.

[15.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. II, n. 228, p. 318.

[16.](#) Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne*, p. 174.

[17.](#) ASV, SM, XXIX, f. 120r-v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 375, p. 98; *Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXIX, pp. 568-569.

[18.](#) On these problems and on the relations between Venice and the empire of Trebizond in general, see Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, especially chapter II, pp. 71-139.

[19.](#) ASV, SM, XXXI, ff. 70v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 419, pp. 108-109.

[20.](#) Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, pp. 86-87; Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond and Venice*, pp. 1-8; Karpov, *The problem of customs duties*, pp. 161-171.

[21.](#) ASV, SM, XXXI, ff. 95v and 97; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 424, p. 110. On 8 May 1364 the four market galleys headed to Tana and Trebizond were sold respectively for 55, 63, 63 and 64 gross lire compared to an average figure of 122 and over 170 gross lire for the Cyprus galleys and those of Alexandria-Beirut.

[22.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 419; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 117, paper 120, in which on 3 October 1362 Bartolomeo of Florence sold a Tatar slave to Lorenzo Quirino of Santa Maria of Venice for 400 aspri; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 134bis, Various Notaries, slave contracts 11 July 1366; ASV, SM, XXX, f. 73r and 74r; Fenster, *Zur Fahrt der venezianischen Handelsgaleeren*, pp. 165-166.

[23.](#) ASV, SM, XXXI, f. 70v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 419, pp. 108-109.

[24.](#) ASV, SM, XXXI, ff. 59v-61v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 417, p. 108.

[25.](#) ASV, SM, XXXI, ff. 138v-139; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 433, p. 112; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 117, perg. 133 of 1 July 1366; for G. 134 of 17 July 1366.

[26.](#) The Ottoman conquest of Adrianople has been thoroughly studied, not only because of its historical importance, but also because the sources provide contradictory dating. The city certainly fell into Turkish hands between 1361 and 1371. Recent studies have proposed a year between 1366 and 1369 as the most probable date. See Vatin, *The rise of the Ottomans*, p. 49; Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 36-38; Wittek, *The formation of the Ottoman empire*; Zachariadou, *Romania and the Turks*.

[27.](#) Amadeus of Savoy took the cross in Avignon on April 1, 1364. Thiriet, *A proposal for an anti-Turkish league*, p. 332; Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, p. 85.

[28.](#) Uwais was the son of the first Jalairida emir Hasan Buzurg (d. 1356) and the Chobanid princess Dilshan Khatun (d. 1351), former wife of Abu Said, from 1333 until the ilkhān's death. Atwood, *Encyclopedia*, p. 236; *Ta'rīkh-i Shaikh Uwais*.

[29.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. III, n. 485, p. 81; *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 158-159.

[30.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 159-160; Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. III, n. 522, p. 86.

[31.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 158-159; Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, p. ninety two.

[32.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, p. 163. The seized goods were then returned to the Persian merchants, perhaps because Giustiniani did not receive instructions from his homeland on how to proceed with compensation. See what Karpov says, *The Empire of Trebizond*, pp. 92-93.

[33.](#) Kozyr, *Syn'ovods' ka bytva 1362*, pp. 189-198; Uzelak, *Tatary v Dunajsko-Dnestrovskom Meždureč'e*, pp. 416-433; Mykhaylovskiy, *European Expansion*, pp. 43-48.

[34.](#) Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 270 and note 47.

[35.](#) Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 235-238; Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, p. 55; Id., *The Six-Hundredth Anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo Field*, pp. 298-310 (rest. in *Russia and Mongols*, pp. 165-176).

[36.](#) Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 271; Martin, *Medieval Russia*, p. 213; Pelenski, *The Context for the Legacy of Kievan Rus*, p. 144; Fennel, *A History of the Russian Church*, p. 152.

[37.](#) The bibliography on the Battle of Kulikovo and its historical significance is copious. Here it will be sufficient to report some of the most recent and significant studies. On the perspective of Russian sources, see Garzaniti, *The medieval origins of "holy Russia"*, pp. 35-70. For an overview and in-depth analysis see Halperin, *The Battle of Kulikovo*, pp. 853-864; Halperin, *A Tatar Interpretation of the Battle of Kulikovo Field*, pp. 4-19.

[38.](#) In this regard, the picture offered by the ancient, but always very informative, Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, chap. is very instructive. VI, pp. 193-205; see also Prochorov, *Etničeskaja integracija*. Furthermore, it is difficult not to believe that Tamerlane's work against the Golden Horde and Lithuania in the last years of the 14th century was decisive for the rise of Moscow. See also Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, p. 57 and Halperin, *The Russian Land and the Russian Tsar*, pp. 48-52.

[39.](#) ASV, SM, XXXIII, f. 19v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 476, p. 121.

[40.](#) Vasary, *The Beginning of Coinage*, p. 382.

[41.](#) Atwood, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 42.

[42.](#) Russian sources describe Kidyr as *oglan*, or crown prince of the Blue Horde. In fact Kidyr was the son of khan Sasi Buqa (r. 1313-1321). Kidyr was legitimately a Jochid as he was of Shaybanid origins, that is, a descendant of Shĕybĕn (d. 1266), fifth son of Jochi.

[43.](#) Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, pp. 261-262.

[44.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 463, p. 119 (13 May 1368), n. 474, p. 121 (7-8 May 1369), n. 486, pp. 123-124 (28-32 May 1370), n. 498, p. 126 (19 May 1371), n. 508, pp. 127-128 (20 May 1372), n. 523, pp. 130-131 (21 June 1373), n. 540, p. 134 (8 June 1374), n. 561, p. 139 (24-29 May 1375) and n. 579, pp. 144-145 (5 June 1376).

[45.](#) Navigation resumed only in the summer of 1384: Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 676, p. 164; Karpov, *Venetian navigation*, pp. 46-47.

[46.](#) ASV, SM, XXXV, ff. 16, 24-24v and 26v; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, I, n. 540 and 561, p. 139; Stöckly, *Le système de l'Incanto*, pp. 110-111 and the tables on pp. 371-374; Karpov, *Venetian navigation*, p. 91, table 7.

[47.](#) ASV, SM, XXXIII, ff. 64v-65; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, I, n. 488, p. 124.

[48.](#) ASV, SM, XXXIV, f. 102; Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, I, n. 537, p. 133.

[49.](#) Toqtamysh was the grandson of Urus and a descendant of the Chinggisid clan. DeWeese, *Toĕtamiĕšyĕh;ĕ Jackson, The Mongols and the West*, p. 219 and n. 174; see also Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 278.

[50.](#) Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, p. 264.

[51.](#) Favereau, *The Horde*, pp. 278.

[52.](#) Ibid., p. 280.

[53.](#) According to some authors Timur also granted the city of Signaq to Toqtamysh, which however did not he had yet conquered. Grekov, Yakubovsky, *The Golden Horde*, p. 265.

[54.](#) Ibid., p. 267.

[55.](#) Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 280.

[56.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 457; Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde*, pp. 126-127. According to the calculations of Balard Mamaĭ died in Caffa between March and November 1381.

[57.](#) Venice attempted a peaceful solution to the negotiations, but also planned the coup d'état, as the documents prove. See the detailed reconstruction in Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, pp. 99-101.

[58.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 249-250.

[59.](#) Karpov, *Venetian navigation*, p. 102; for a general overview of the events of recent years see also Karpov, *Veneciansko-trapezundskij konflikt*, pp. 102-109.

[60.](#) Balard, *The fight against Genoa*, pp. 114-115.

[61.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 592 and 593, pp. 146-147; Chinazzo, *Cronica*, pp. 19-20.

[62.](#) Chinazzo, *Cronica*, pp. 209-210.

[63.](#) ASV, SM, XXXVIII, f. 34v; Thiriet *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 648 and 649, p. 158; Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, p. 101.

[64.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 188-190.

[65.](#) Tamerlane derives from Timur *leng*, in Persian *lame*, a nickname given to him when, already an adult, he was left disabled with one leg. On the occasion of Timur's birth, just like when Chinggis Khan was born, legend has it that the child was born with a blood clot in his hand which according to the *Secret History of the Mongols* represented an imperial destiny. The Barlas were related to the Chinggiside Borjin clan. The bibliography on Tamerlane is copious, but this is not the place to give an adequate account.

Russian sources speak of the character in great detail: *Moskovskij Letopis'nyj*. The description given by Grousset 1965 is very interesting, even if a little fictionalised. Although dated, Prawdin's biography is still valid. However, the best monograph on the character remains B. Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*. All of Jean Aubin's writings are fundamental in this regard, but they are not collected in an organic synthesis. Among less recent works see Kehren, *Tamerlan*; Roux, *Tamerlane*, with an updated bibliography. One of the most interesting and instructive narrative sources on the Mongolian leader is certainly Clavijo's Journey: González de Clavijo, *Journey to Samarkand*.

Another excellent critical edition is the one edited by Anna Spinelli, *From the Alboran Sea to Samarkand*.

The privileged observatory on the work of the Mongolian leader as written by an eyewitness of most of the events remains *The History of the Armenian vardapet T'ovma Metsobets'i (The History of Tamerlane and His Successors)*.

[66.](#) Qazaghan had managed, in 1346, to establish himself as head of the tribal aristocracy in the ulus chagadaide by exploiting the power crisis that had persisted for years. Having no blood ties with the Chinggisids, he always governed indirectly, personally choosing the khans to place on the throne and closely monitoring their activities. Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, pp. 157-158 and 160.

[67.](#) Toghluk Timur was in all likelihood a direct descendant of Chagadai, and therefore enjoyed much greater prestige than that of his Western antagonist Qazakhan. Grousset, *L'Empire des steppes*, p. 344.

[68.](#) Toqtamys sought allies perhaps because he was concerned about Timur's reaction to the conquest of Tabriz. Favereau, *The Horde*, p. 284.

[69.](#) See Forbes Mainz, *The Rise and Rule*, pp. 71-72.

[70.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 70-73.

[71.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. III, n. 260, p. 187.

[72.](#) *Ibid.*

[73.](#) *Ibid.*, vol. III, n. 264, p. 188.

[74.](#) *Ibid.*, vol. III, n. 274, pp. 189-190.

[75.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 93.

[76.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 853, p. 202.

[77.](#) On this position also Berindei, Veinstein, *La Tana-Azaq*, pp. 124-126.

[78.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 898, p. 211.

[79.](#) Stöckly, *Le Système de l'incanto*, pp. 378-386; Berindei, Veinstein, *La Tana-Azaq*, p. 127.

[80.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 913, p. 214.

[81.](#) Giomo, *Commemorative Books*, vol. III, n. 54, pp. 244-245.

[82.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 927, p. 217.

[83.](#) *Ibid.*, vol. I, n. 930, p. 217. Andrea Giustiniani had to ask for the reduction of the *commercium* from 3 to 1.5% and gain the sympathy of the Mongolian treasurer Mirsa who, we read in the document, exercises great influence on Toqtamys.

[84.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 934, pp. 218-219.

[85.](#) *Ibid.*, vol. I, n. 958, p. 222.

[86.](#) The five galleys of Beirut reached a total of 819 lire, the three of Alexandria 647 lire. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 934, p. 219.

7. After the Golden Horde: Venice and the Mongols until the Ottoman conquest

1. *Reconstruction and recovery in Tana after Tamerlano*

The failure of Timur's attempt to restore the Mongol empire foundered upon his death, in 1405, in a prolonged war of succession that opened up new scenarios for the Latins perched on the Pontic coasts. The international situation underwent profound changes caused by the rise of Ottoman power and the completion of the process of political disintegration of the Mongol empire in the West. Freed from the "Tatar yoke", the principalities of Lithuania and Russia began to exercise increasing control over the territories of the Golden Horde and Crimea, and over the trade routes that connected them to the ports of the region.

The new political protagonists that emerged forcefully in the first half of the fifteenth century, in particular the principality of Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire, overlapped with local and regional potentates, such as the Crimean Khanate, the Principality of Theodore, the Empire of Trebizond, and the Byzantine Empire itself, whose sovereignty was now reduced to the control of Constantinople alone. The Italian colonies, increasingly restricted both in terms of commercial movements and in their range of political action, were forced to navigate and redefine their strategies depending on the situation in order to survive in the midst of such swirling currents, recalibrating priorities with relative growth in costs, risks, and uncertainties. Furthermore, the loss of access to Asian markets once guaranteed by the Mongols had narrowed that vast horizon which, both in commercial practice and in the imagination of the merchant, had initially justified the maintenance of a stable presence on the Black Sea. For the Venetians, whose logistical support was more fragile than that of Genoa, adapting to the new needs required sacrifices, and above all affected the social composition of the Venetian population and the type of activities undertaken. But what he put in

discussion the future of the settlements on the Black Sea, perhaps even more profoundly than local hostilities and diminished profit opportunities, was the change in direction of Venice's own policy, which on the one hand expanded into the Venetian and Lombard hinterland, and on the other redirected its trade with the East through the Egyptian ports, where spices flowed via the sea routes of India and Southeast Asia.

Despite the destruction brought by Tamerlane, the Venetian community in Tana demonstrated courage and resilience, and at the dawn of the 15th century the situation was generally encouraging. Commercial activities were quickly restarted both in Tana and in other locations on the Black Sea, including Trebizond, the other Venetian hub in Pontus. However, dangers and uncertainties remained which led to progressive structural changes. Within this adaptation process we can identify two opposing trends. On the one hand we witnessed the tenacious resistance of administrators and traders who demonstrated a remarkable ability to reinvent their positions and objectives. On the other hand, more or less immediate threats increased, indicative of the climate of growing uncertainty determined by uncontrollable and unpredictable phenomena which the merchant Giovanni Cornaro described as a series of ¹ It is therefore in a climate of not very reassuring omens that the Venetian nooks continued to frequent the ports of the Black Sea. However, the era of land expeditions was over: the Central Asian and Iranian trade routes were "labyrinths". firmly in the hands of Muslim merchants serving the Timurid government. The Venetian and Genoese merchants were instead excluded from it, or rather, they excluded themselves, undoubtedly due to the damage they suffered at the hands of Timur, and the continuous wars that made them impracticable. On the other hand, the journeys to India and South-East Asia of Niccolò de' Conti from Chioggia are indicative of the maritime routes that had already largely replaced the land routes, even if an Italian presence on these latitudes did not materialise.

2

At the beginning of the 15th century it was the Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas (r. 1401-1430), already an ally of Toqtamysh, who exercised the greatest influence in Tatar politics, fragmented into power struggles between the Jochid descendants and other political figures such as the khan Edigü (1352-1419), against whom he had fought during the Timurid wars. In these years a part of the Tatar population moved to Lithuania and Vytautas continued to play a central role in Crimean politics until his death in 1430, also trying to subjugate Caffa and the ³ For its part, Tana was untouched by expansionism Genoese possessions. Lithuanian. The most urgent danger "warlords" who competed to the settlement was represented by the belligerent activities of Tatar for the remnants of the dominion

Mongolian, threatening the security of the trading bases. On several occasions the Tatar leaders attacked Tana, requiring costly investments to strengthen walls and fortifications, and to hire a garrison from the motherland for its defense. Furthermore, the Genoese, firmly entrenched in Caffa and their other bases in the Crimea, as well as in control of the southern coasts of the Black Sea, continued to enjoy a dominant position. Although Caffa and the other colonies were largely independent from Genoa, which had come under the alternating domination of the French and Milanese, relations with the Venetians continued to be affected by the tensions between the two republics.

Another source of concern and instability was the rise of Ottoman power, less felt at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but of growing intensity after the accession to the throne of Murad II (r. 1421-1444), until the definitive collapse of the little that remained of the Byzantine Empire. Venetian foreign policy was oriented at the same time towards the expansion and development of its mainland dominions (*state de terra*), initiated by Doge Michele Steno (r. 1400-1413), in Veneto, Friuli, and Lombardy. Venice did not abandon its sea possessions, but gradually downsized its strategy in the Aegean, especially after the futile and costly undertaking of the defense of Thessalonica and the failure of the "Varna Crusade" against the Ottomans. Trade and economic activities generally underwent further structural change, reducing investment in long-distance ventures, which previously spanned Asian markets. If in the second half of the fourteenth century merchants still reached Saraj, after the destruction of Tana the spaces were reduced, favoring the local economy: the fishing industry, in particular dried fish and caviar, the slave trade, and transport within the Black Sea. Livestock farming, which was the main economic activity of the Pontic steppes, was also a source of commercial products such as skins and horses. Spices and raw silk continued to arrive through Central Asian markets under Timurid control, which Shah Rukh (r. 1405-1447), Timur's son and successor, sought to keep open and active, with Samarkand as the nerve center of the routes to China .

2. Venice between Tartars, Genoese and Ottomans

The war between Toqtamys and Timur had had two very important effects for the political stability of the Black Sea. First, the substantial failure of Timur's project to recreate the pre-existing unity on the model of the Mongol khanates had accelerated the dissolution of the Horde 'Gold. Secondly, it had favored political fragmentation that had already been underway for some time, as we have

seen in the previous chapter, without producing a credible alternative. In the state of confusion that reigned during the first half of the fifteenth century, three main trends can be identified. The first was the rise of local potentates, dominated by "khan" belonging to rival Tatar aristocratic families and clans, engaged in continuous struggles which culminated in 1446 in the creation of the

Crimean Khanate by Hajji Giray (r. 1441-1456).⁴ These potentates, relatively weak in themselves, sought alliances and agreements with other emerging powers, among which the most important were the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Muscovite principality and the Ottoman Empire, opening up spaces for political and military interventions by these forces. Secondly, the consolidation of the Timurid dynasty in Central Asia and Iran on the basis of political and military structures created by Timur, also preceded by a period of internal strife, could not revitalize that role of communication and commercial osmosis between Asian routes and trade Mediterranean which had belonged to the Mongols. Finally, long-distance traffic moved to the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean which led to Alexandria and other Egyptian ports.

In a situation of constant and sometimes sudden evolution, the Italian outposts on the Black Sea, not having the military strength to intervene in local wars, were forced to navigate between diplomatic operations and defensive interventions. If Caffa and the Genoese possessions in the southern part of the Black Sea, thanks to their geographical location and massive fortifications, enjoyed greater security, Tana was much more exposed. As we saw in the sixth chapter, in 1396, the day after the destruction of the city, the consul Blanco de Ripa went to "Tokhan" (Toqtamysh), to ask for authorization to fortify the Venetian neighborhood.

⁵ The defensive autonomy of the inhabitants of Tana, for whom taking to the sea and sheltering in Caffa had been the only way of escape and survival in case of danger, became a priority that would be reiterated repeatedly in those years. Diplomacy and the payment of trade duties were evidently not enough to guarantee their security in a situation in which rival armies aimed to seize those sources of income, or destroy them if they could benefit the enemy.

The settlement, aware of its vulnerability, therefore had to navigate a difficult political balance, taking risks that often cost the lives of its citizens and government representatives. In fact, Tana, which was still a prosperous city in a relatively poor economic reality, became a magnet for the various khans competing with each other, who aimed either to secure commercial and customs revenues, or simply to sack it and rob the inhabitants, as in 1410, when it was attacked by khan Pulag Beg. Defensive efforts yes

they were renewed in the aftermath of a new Tatar assault, in 1418, by the Mongol khan Kerimber. ⁶ After the sacking of the city, in which, according to Marin Sanudo, 640 merchants lost their lives, the investments were huge: from one thousand to three thousand ducats a year for the construction of additional walls, stone towers, and drawbridges. These new constructions continued throughout the 1420s, and it was thanks to their completion in 1429 that Tana managed to resist Ulugh Berdi's 1431 siege.

⁷

These were very complex years for the politics of the Golden Horde. In the year 1431 Khan Ulugh Mehmed went to war with Baraq and Devlet Berdi. ⁸ previous, moreover, Hajji Giray had de facto taken power in what it will become the Crimean Khanate (the exact date of foundation is disputed). ⁹ Venice asked Genoa for help, which was not to be taken for granted given that Genoa threatened Tana from the sea, while the Tartars besieged it from the mainland, also making use of artillery.

¹⁰ During this period Genoa and Venice were at war with each other on the Black Sea and it seems paradoxical that despite the hostilities Venice tried to present a common front, requesting Genoa to attack the Tartars ¹¹ from the sea.

— The outcome of this "help", however, is unclear, as it seems that the Genoese took advantage of the intervention to further weaken the ¹² Venetian defenses.

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In October 1431 a squadron of five Venetian galleys under the command of Andrea Loredan headed against Caffa to give a show of strength following what had been interpreted as a betrayal of the anti-Tatar pact.

Unfortunately for them, two galleys were shipwrecked off the port of Caffa itself and the Venetians, including Loredan, were captured and imprisoned. Although there were no direct clashes between the two fleets, the climate remained hostile (and the Venetians ¹³ The new consul Sinerio in prison) until ~~the~~ the Peace of Ferrara in 1433.

Querini obtained a large sum (2,000 ducats) to overcome this crisis, aggravated by the appearance of the plague, which caused the loss of many lives. Further defense work was completed in 1437, but once again the Tartars attacked and burned the Venetian quarter in 1442, an attack from which the Venetian community, led by the consul Marco Duodo, miraculously managed to escape.

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If conflicts between Tatar clans had directly threatened the existence of Tana, undoubtedly the main danger for the Venetian presence on the Black Sea was the rise of the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the 15th century this appeared weakened first by the defeats inflicted by Tamerlane on Bayezid I (r. 1389-1402) and secondly by the internal struggles for succession among the sultan's sons, which ended with the accession to the throne of Murad II (1421-1451).

During this period of political instability, Venice had had as its primary objective the protection of the trade routes and its bases in the Aegean, which allowed passage through the Straits and traffic with the Black Sea. To this end, the Venetian government had spared no expense diplomatic and military efforts to reach an agreement with the sultan, using his naval power if necessary. The first clash between the Ottoman and Venetian fleets, under the command of Pietro Loredan, took place off the coast of Gallipoli on 29 May 1416, and saw Venice victorious.

In 1419 a treaty was concluded between the doge Tommaso Mocenigo (r. 1414-1423) and Mehmed, in which the sultan recognized Venetian sovereignty over 38 cities and islands in Romania, but the position of the Republic in the region was not at all secure .

— Despite the continuous attempts to keep diplomatic channels open with the Ottomans, which alternated with displays of force and naval blockades, relations became rougher and more difficult with the accession to the throne of the very young Murad II in 1421. The 1420s were very complicated for Venice, which was forced to spend enormous sums of money and military resources for the occupation and protection of Thessalonica, ceded by the Byzantine emperor, whose kingdom was increasingly exposed to the Ottoman advance and therefore increasingly dependent on external aid. The Venetian diplomatic and military strategy of these years was articulated on several fronts: stemming the Turkish advance, maintaining its positions in the Aegean, and at the same time defending itself from Genoese competition. Furthermore, the Republic had to keep the delicate relations with Milan and the other European powers in balance. While access to the Black Sea continued to be important on a commercial level, the tools to maintain one's positions progressively decreased in effectiveness. The *status quo* depended on the Venetian ability to maintain a substantial equidistance between the Byzantines and the Turks in a climate of growing instability. The defeat suffered in Thessalonica, conquered and sacked by the Turks in 1430, with thousands of inhabitants reduced to slavery, restricted Venice's room for maneuver, which was forced to retreat from apparently acquired and long-lasting positions, and whose defense had been very expensive.

These developments could not fail to have repercussions on the entire Venetian commercial system in the Levant, especially from the moment it became clear that the Byzantine Empire's days were numbered. The Varna Crusade, in fact the last undertaking of Christianity against an Islamic power, was based on unstable alliances between powers that pursued different, if not even conflicting, interests and objectives. The papacy wanted to force the Orthodox to join the Catholic Church; Hungarians and Poles wanted to take back the Balkans and stop further Ottoman advances; the Venetians aimed to maintain the

own privileges in Constantinople and keep navigation with the Black Sea open. The negotiations were complex, especially on the financing front, and disagreements were resolved with difficulty. Once underway, the crusade enjoyed two initial successes which forced the Ottomans to ask for a truce. It was probably a tactical move, given that at this point the internal divisions within the Christian community exacerbated between those who were in favor of an agreement, and others, in particular the Pope, who vigorously opposed it, and wanted the crusade, organized with difficulty, did not dissolve prematurely. But the continuation of the enterprise soon turned into a defeat, suffered in 1444 in Varna, in today's Bulgaria, mainly due to the lack of cohesion and coordination between the various departments of the Crusader army, aggravated by numerical inferiority and difficulties tactics, after the Crusaders had become bottled up in an area between Lake Varna and the Black Sea coast. The Ottomans subsequently also triumphed in the 1448 Battle of Kosovo, and at this point it became clear that the Black Sea route would soon fall under Turkish control, and that the defense of Constantinople itself would have been impossible.

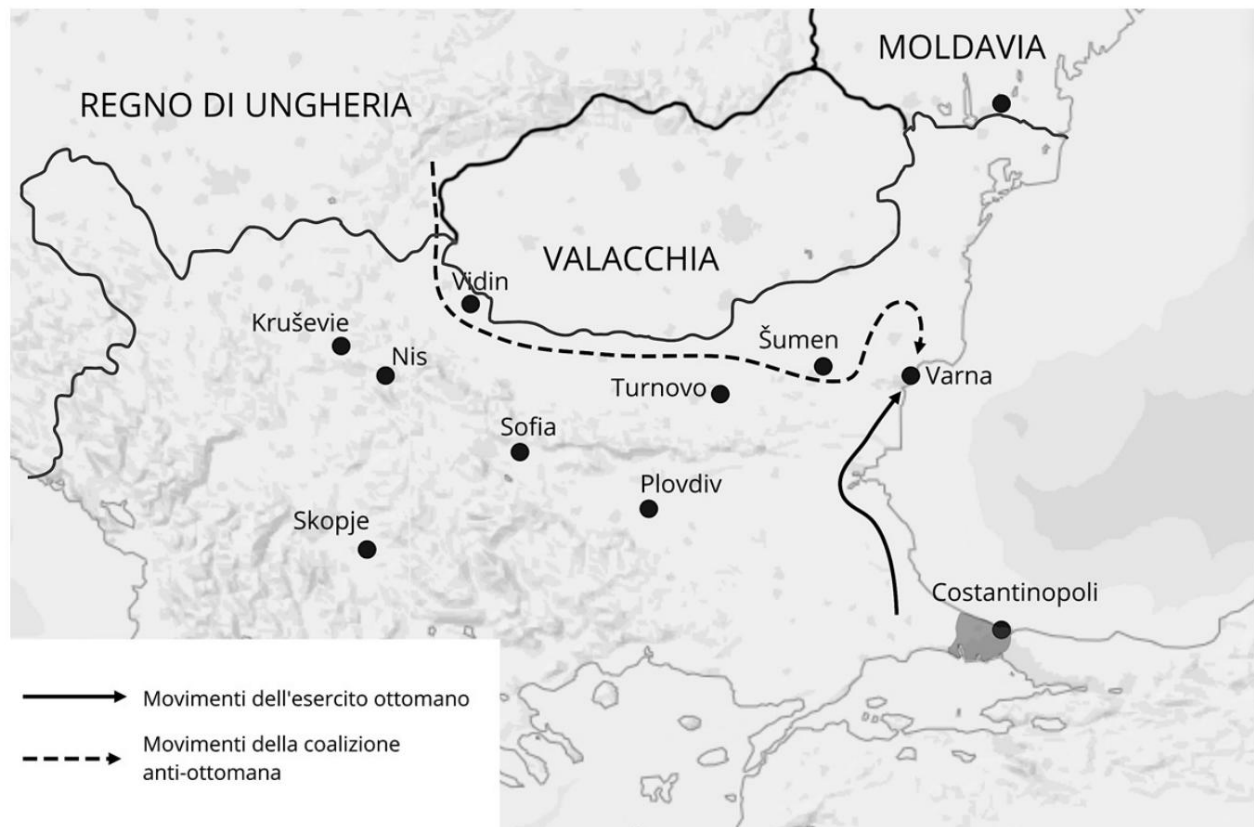
It was obvious that the Turks could easily close access to the city and in this way definitively cut the umbilical cord that still tied the Italian colonies to the motherland. And once again the structural differences between Genoa and Venice emerged to determine relations with the Ottoman Empire. If Venice relied on diplomacy between states, which generally guaranteed relatively stable conditions, Genoa tried to negotiate *on site*, regardless of the support of its government, which was unstable in this period anyway. On the other hand, on the Black Sea Genoa was much stronger than Venice, and its military and commercial capabilities, as well as the security provided by the imposing fortifications erected to protect the settlements, made its network of colonies a political protagonist in all respects .

Although the balance of power was unbalanced, Venice and Genoa found themselves facing the same challenges, which saw both in an increasingly precarious position, but even in this condition of common danger they were unable to find an agreement. Venice continued to support Theodore's principality more or less secretly against Caffa and the other Genoese bases in Gothia, or in southwestern Crimea. The port cities of Cembalo, Caulita and Lusta, and a narrow strip of coastal land (region called Parathalassia in Greek) were under Genoese rule (Captainate of Gothia), which had effectively deprived the 16 Theodorites of access to the sea.

— The Genoese had acquired these ports following a 1380 treaty with the Tartars, then in control of the region, and

established that it was duty-free.

[17](#)



Map 1. The Varna Crusade (1444)

After the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, Venetian diplomacy tried to reactivate its relations with the Sublime Porte as soon as possible, with the main objective of keeping the passage open for its ships through the Straits. While the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople profoundly damaged Venetian interests on the Black Sea, it did not lead to an immediate rupture. The treaty concluded between Venice and Mehmed II in 1454 ensured the safety of the Venetians in the former Byzantine capital, the passage of their ships and the security of [18](#) trade.

— But this situation balanced between opening and closing was not destined to last.

Trebizond, for its part, was conquered by the Ottomans in 1461. With Tamerlane, traffic through Tabriz had restarted, but the failure of the Timurid attempt to reconstitute the Mongol empire caused trade to decline once again in Persia, which ended up under the rule of Turkmen tribes rivals (the Kara Qoyunlu and the Ak Qoyunlu). Trebizond maintained its independence, and remained an essential base for regional trade, thus assuming the role of a terminal rather than a stopover and transit towards the interior. Genoese and

Venetians purchased products from the hinterland, especially metals from Anatolian mines, the main ones being alum, copper, iron and silver.

[19](#)

For the Venetians, Trebizond constituted the third pole of an ideal triangle that united the north the Black Sea (Tana) to the south (Trebizond) and Constantinople. The three vertices of this triangle still expressed the strengths of Venetian trade in the 15th century, but this structure would soon shatter. The fall of Trebizond therefore marked a further step towards Ottoman control of the Black Sea, which increasingly became a *mare nostrum* in a Turkish way. Once the political balance on the shores of the Black Sea finally shifted from north to south, that is, from the khans of the Golden Horde, followers of the Mongol conquerors, to the Ottoman sultans, the fate of the Italian colonies was sealed.

In Italy in this period there spread a general perception of the inevitability of a domino effect which, after the fall of Constantinople, would have caused the collapse of all the Italian possessions in the Black Sea and Aegean areas, opening the doors to an advance Ottoman beyond the Balkans. Faced with this belief, two visions were opposed: one that proposed European unity to resist Ottoman expansion with a new crusade, and another in which each state would mobilize on its own in order to protect itself from a direct attack. In fact, creating an anti-Turkish coalition had proven impossible, despite many complaints about this, especially in ecclesiastical circles. The powers most directly affected by the Ottoman conquest, such as Venice, relied above all on their own diplomacy to try to save what could be saved and above all to keep the trade channels open. But this was not enough to avoid the clash and in 1463 hostilities with Mehmed II broke out.

The war would end in 1479, but already in 1475 the Ottomans took Tana, marking the end of the Venetian presence on the Black Sea.

This history would not be complete without mentioning the relations between Venice and the Mamluk sultanate, which played a fundamental role in the general reorganization of trade with the East in the 15th century. If in 1365 Venice had played an important role in the anti-Mamluk crusade led by Peter I of Lusignan, king of Cyprus, this does not seem to have had a negative effect on subsequent developments between the Serenissima and the sultanate. On the contrary, it was the Genoese, who had participated in the crusade with smaller forces, who were penalized. The favor acquired by Venice at the sultan's court should perhaps be read in the light of a more far-sighted diplomacy, and the ability of Venetian merchants to position themselves as partners of the sultan, facilitating his commercial policies.

The main reason for the rapprochement between Venice and the sultanate, especially after the Peace of Turin (1381), was Venice's search for a direct relationship with Mamluk Egypt which did not depend, as had happened until that moment, from any Cypriot intermediation. Genoa had an important base in Famagusta, which acted as a bridge for trade with the Egyptian coasts, but starting from the early fifteenth century raids and acts of piracy on the coasts from Egypt to Syria intensified at the hands of the Genoese, Catalans and Cypriots who escaped the surveillance of their respective governments.

Venice, which had greater control over its citizens, instead managed to enforce the agreements stipulated at diplomatic level, and therefore to maintain a level of legality that allowed it to increase the volume of trade.

The reliability of Venice, and the branches of its commercial networks in northern Europe, guaranteed the Mamelukes continuity in trade and a very large business base, especially for spices. The state monopoly imposed by the sultan on spices in the first half of the fifteenth century, which consisted of requiring foreign merchants to purchase a certain percentage of the product from the state before turning to private individuals, favored those who could buy goods in large quantities and enjoy access to both markets. The monopoly regime, among other things, had lower prices than the free market, and therefore did not necessarily harm the foreign merchant. The fundamental fact in relation to the Black Sea is that the Venetians who invested in spices transferred their capital from the Black Sea to Alexandria, enjoying a privileged position compared to Genoa, which instead saw itself relegated to a role that was not only subordinate but hostile. Genoese merchants remained the main suppliers of slaves from the Black Sea, a trade that had been in their hands for some time, but other spaces closed. For Venice, in the 15th century, the Black Sea - no longer a gateway to access the markets of deep Asia, nor the sole or main place of supply of spices - lost much of its ancient appeal, especially for those investing in long-term prospects. This does not mean that a certain volume of business continued, albeit increasingly limited to the local economy.

3. The Black Sea economy in the first half of the fifteenth century

Timur's death had not only stopped the process of reconstituting a vast post-Mongol empire, but had also dealt the final blow to any residual aspiration of Italian merchants to directly access Asian markets, an aspiration which was never directly supported by the respective governments.

The caravan routes were monopolized by Central Asian agents and merchants, and in any case much of the traffic had already been diverted towards the sea routes of the Indian Ocean. Eurasian trade dynamics underwent strong changes in the 15th century, which have both proximate and remote causes. The disintegration of the Mongol empire in China had led to a progressive closure of land routes, which was counterbalanced, at the beginning of the 15th century, by the resumption of commercial activities on sea routes. China, however, took an official position of closing trade. Southern ports, such as Quanzhou and Guangzhou, which for centuries had hosted a thriving community of Muslim merchants, were closed to long-distance trade, due to the hostility of the Chinese population towards foreign communities who had enjoyed privileged treatment during the Mongol rule.

The position of the Ming emperors (1368-1644) was characterized by xenophobic tendencies that produced restrictive policies towards international trade. Promulgated for the first time in 1371, and reiterated several times, the ban on private trade accelerated a process of diaspora of merchant families. These, effectively expelled from Chinese ports, radiated across southwestern Asia: the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and eastern India. The abandonment of deeply rooted communities caused, if not a real fracture in the traffic between China and the Indian Ocean, certainly its profound restructuring. The various expeditions of Admiral Zheng He, between 1405 and 1433, did not succeed, nor were they intended, to establish a new commercial order between China and the West, but rather to promote diplomatic relations according to the doctrine of tributary relations, in which China required other states to place themselves in a position of political subordination in exchange for preferential treatment that included, among other things, access to trade. The reconstituted international order of the Ming favored the political dimension of international relations over the commercial one, and if delegations continued to arrive in Beijing, this occurred following and as a corollary to the "presentation of the tribute" due to the Chinese emperor by states and nations that they called themselves "tributaries". In practice, only a relationship of political subordination could allow access to a commercial relationship, and this greatly limited the scope of trade between China and foreign countries.

Ming China certainly no longer guaranteed Islamic and Western merchants the privileged position, the logistical and financial support, as well as the freedom of movement, offered by the Mongols, and especially on the southern coasts this led to the abandonment of markets that had been active for centuries. This favored the creation of alternative structures, the formation of diasporic communities in Southeast Asia and more fluid but less secure or permanent forms of exchange. In

essentially, a trend contrary to the one that had developed in the 13th century accelerated. If the Black Sea had become, with the Mongols, the hub for trade on an almost global scale, in the 15th century it tended to return to a regional dimension, and to give way to the maritime routes that from East Asia reached China and ended in Egypt. The Indian Ocean route, from the coasts of western India to Sumatra, was explored and documented by Niccolò de' Conti, from Chioggia, in the same period. Although it is the testimony of an isolated traveller, it documents the commercial vitality of the maritime routes, and this new geographical dimension could be known and appreciated instantly in Italy as his report was drawn up just after de' Conti's return.

20

Returning to the Black Sea, it must however be said that the upheaval of the great axes and trade routes did not immediately mark the end of the Venetian and Genoese colonies. The trades remained active and justified the maintenance and defense of the community of Tana. If the pressure of political events, combined with fewer business opportunities, could easily lead to the rapid dissolution of these communities, we must ask ourselves how and why they continued to stubbornly resist, in the face of very high risks, caused not only by the hostility of the Tartars and the Ottomans, but also by periodic famines and plagues. As regards Tana, which was more exposed to raids than the Genoese possessions in Crimea, the reasons we can identify are mainly two, namely the performance of the activities started decades earlier, in particular in the sector of fish production and maritime transport and , secondly, the continuous integration with the economy of the former Golden Horde, which on the one hand caused a greater dependence of the "colonial" economy on the productive activities of the hinterland and in the Pontic steppes, and on the other allowed businesses to remain profitable.

To look at this situation in greater detail, let's start from the products of the cargo of some Venetian corks in Tana in 1402. The analysis of the goods already shows a clear preponderance of local products: leather (18%), fish (17%), caviar (34 %), slaves (8%) and in less appreciable quantities wax (4%), salted meat, nuts, and metals. Long-distance products, from Central Asia and China, consist of spices (11%), silks (5%) and oriental fabrics (1%).

²¹ From this cargo letter we can glimpse the activities in which the Venetians continued to be present. These can be summarized in two main forms: direct production and imports from the Golden Horde. Direct production, managed *on site* by Venetian companies, was concentrated in the fishing industry and in the production of caviar, particularly abundant in the Sea of Azov. The economy

of the Golden Horde, which developed significantly during the 14th century, was instead the source of goods from various separate productive sectors. Agriculture mainly produced wheat and millet. The nomadic pastoral economy produced leather, horses, cattle, tallow wax, and salted meats. There was also a rich hunting and gathering economy, which provided fur, game, beeswax, dried fruit, and also the slave trade, captured by nomads and sold to foreign merchants.

Cereals, and in particular wheat, millet and barley, as we have mentioned several times, were among the main items in demand in Europe. However, in the fifteenth century the importation of cereals decreased especially for Genoa, which was more active in this sector, but also for Venice. There was a general shortage of wheat whose production in the Danube and Ukrainian areas at the beginning of the fifteenth century had [22](#) Caffa itself suffered several setbacks for climatic reasons. import some.

shortages of grain, and found itself forced to [23](#) However, Venice also became less dependent on eastern grain imports thanks to the aforementioned expansion of the *state of terra* in Veneto, Lombardy and Romagna during the first half of the 15th century.

The Golden Horde was also rich in fruits and vegetables, among which melons and watermelons were especially prized. Naturally, given the abundant pastures, livestock and sheep farming were among the most important economic sectors; leather and horses are among the most exported local products. According to Giosafat Barbaro (1413-1494), a Venetian politician and merchant, a certain quality of oxen was brought from the Crimea overland to Germany via Poland and [24](#) Transylvania.

— Furthermore, the nomads were excellent hunters, and in the Golden Horde there was an abundance of fine and non-fine skins and furs, from ermine and sable to fox, marmot and squirrel, to name a few, which constituted one of the most important export items.

[25](#)

Finally, the slave trade, which continued to be active, must be considered. Even more than previously, the Venetians who arrived in Tana were mostly celibate males, and those who could afford it purchased female slaves in order to provide themselves with concubines and domestic help. Upon his arrival in Tana in 1416, ambassador Pietro Loredan made contact with a merchant for the purchase of five slaves, paid at the average price of 220 bezants and in 1439 Alessandro Zeno and Giacomo Badoer purchased 150 slaves for Sicily at a price of [26](#) Some of these ratios became *more* average price of 107 hyperperi. *uxorio* and were recognized as such in the will. The slaves came, as in the communities. These were generally [previous](#) century, mainly from Tartar and Circassian young people, kidnapped or sold by

parents in times of famine. In any case, all transactions took place at a local level, and it is unclear how many slaves actually arrived in Venice or Europe. Upon repatriation, some Venetians brought with them the slaves purchased in Tana. Whether this was the main channel of slave importation, however, is difficult to confirm. In any case, prices seem to fall in this period, perhaps a sign of a decline in demand (see the eleventh chapter).

[27](#)

Among the local industries, the fishing industry was particularly developed, which included fishing, conservation, and export of fish, in particular sturgeon, of which the Sea of Azov was rich due to the brackish quality of the water in the Don estuary. The fishing areas, or fishponds, along the coast were controlled by the Venetians, whose companies had been active for generations, such as that of the Civran family, which we find represented by several members (Luca, Niccolò, Daniele) residing in Tana. [28](#)

The greater localization of activities did not automatically translate into a drastic contraction of commercial profits, nor into a closure to trade between the Black Sea and Europe, but rather into a reduction in the range of action of the merchant, who in any case remained exposed to the volatility of the situation political and the increase in risks in direct proportion to the lack of guarantees and protection previously offered by Mongolian governments. Fishponds were often run in partnership with non-Venetians, for example Greeks and even Genoese. In reality the sources show a great variety of activities that saw Venetians operating side by side with other Italians and locals, in what had always been a cosmopolitan society, even if occasionally crossed by ethnic and political tensions.

The documentation from the archives of Niccolò de Varsis and Benedetto de Smeritis, notaries in Tana in the decade between 1430 and 1440, gives us the pulse of the contraction of the commercial horizon. [29](#) If cities once present in notarial registers, such as Astrakhan, Urgench and Samarkand, disappear from this documentation, this does not necessarily mean that goods no longer arrived from those markets, but rather that trade with Asia east of the Volga it was carried out through intermediaries, and was now in the hands of Turkish, Persian and Central Asian merchants. Eastern goods such as spices and silk continued to flow in but in smaller quantities. Most of these products mainly arrived in Trabzon from Tabriz. In 1404, when the route with Tabriz was still open, Venice imported 31 tons of silk, 20 of pepper, 20 of indigo, 7 of cinnamon, 4 of ginger, 41 of leather and an unspecified number of pearls. Although these quantities are lower than those of the same goods

imported through Beirut and Alexandria, they were conspicuous enough to justify the Venetian stay in the region.

³⁰ In practice, long-distance trade continued to operate but was significantly reduced. The enchantments of the galleys for the Black Sea between 1405 and 1450 include a quarter of all the enchantments of the Levant and in particularly favorable periods, due to the lack of wars and other impediments, they reach up to 38%.

³¹ Finally, it should be noted that exports from Europe to the East were not lacking but were relatively small compared to the size and value of imports. In an absolutely central and predominant position were i

³² wool and linen fabrics, of excellent quality and coming from various parts of Europe. Much less important, but still present, were the products of European craftsmanship, in particular glass, weapons and jewellery. In any case, European exports did not compensate for the value of imports. It can therefore be hypothesized that the difference was made up by the export of precious metals as a means of payment (see the tenth chapter on this). The transport activities on ships operated by the Venetians (as well as by the Genoese) also contributed to the local economy and were service goods that should be counted among exports.

4. *Government and society in Tana in the 15th century*

In general, the Venetian community in Tana suffered a demographic decline during the first half of the century, but the quality of the inhabitants also changed.

After the destruction brought by Tamerlane, which had dealt a severe blow to the Venetian population of Tana, the city was rebuilt partly by locals who continued to operate their own businesses, and partly by new immigrants, artisans and merchants who did not necessarily have with Tana pre-existing corporate or family relationships. Several people went to Caffa and Tana hoping to improve their economic condition, and therefore they were ³³ The consul, maximum people often in debt and without the means to invest. authority, he was always appointed by the senate and assisted by a council of 12 ³⁴ merchants.

— However, the position had gradually become less coveted. If in the past this was a remunerative position, as the consul not only received a salary, but invested in local trade, in this phase the risks increased, the investment opportunities were reduced, and the expenses increased. If the senate was unable to meet the needs of the city, it was the consul himself who had to raise funds *locally*, imposing special taxes on the merchants.

One of the city government's major concerns was the defense of

city, which led to a strong increase in public spending, not only for the construction of fortifications, completed in 1429, but also for the maintenance of a permanent garrison, made up of a troop of between twenty-five and thirty professional crossbowmen, paid 4 ducats per month.

³⁵ Failure to pay salaries to the military garrison in the 1930s led to its abandonment by the military. The soldiers sent to Tana were not willing to remain in such an isolated and distant place without receiving the compensation they were due. One wonders why the Venetians did not try to solve the defense problem by hiring local troops, but evidently either the foreign mercenaries were not considered reliable, and it was feared that they would disappear in times of need, or it was not possible to find an adequate level of professionalism among the Venetian residents for the formation of a sort of civic militia.

The financial difficulties that Tana faced in 1429-30 soured relations with the Tatar leaders who continued to demand payment of the *terraticum*, i.e. the land tax already paid to the khans of the Golden Horde. This caused obvious problems in relations with the local aristocracy who often took recourse on the merchants themselves. There are many cases of Venetians forced to return to their homeland without possessions due to robberies suffered at the hands of Tartars and Circassians.

³⁶ In practice, individual merchants were not only endangered by a general state of lawlessness, and the lack of protection and reimbursement guarantees enjoyed during the time of the Mongol Empire, but also by default in payments and possible ruptures in diplomatic relations. with the local lords.

Ulugh Berdi's attack on Tana in 1431 was the manifestation of a threat that, although it did not often materialize, was nevertheless always present, and required constant diplomatic efforts to settle differences and settle disputes.

³⁷

The city had health and welfare services. A doctor was sent to Tana by order of the senate and paid 40 sums per year, such as Giacomo of Milan, who provided assistance to the residents in the period 1411-1417, and whose name appears in various wills as a person present at the time of death. Assistance to the poor and sick was given by the confraternity of the School of Santa Maria and Sant'Antonio, together with the churches and convents of San Francesco and San Domenico, built by the missionary orders already in the previous century.

³⁸

For the rest, Tana's life was a frontier life, open to disparate forms of cooperation with the various local people. Apart from the incident of 1431, relations between the Venetians and the Genoese did not reach the levels of crisis and open conflict that had so often made coexistence between the two communities difficult

in the fourteenth century. Venice's trade with the Black Sea continued, with ups and downs, influenced by political uncertainties, but overall it remained an important part of Venetian imports. The Golden Horde economy continued to supply grain, slaves, and other products in demand on European markets. Furthermore, the Venetians had become producers themselves and had entered the service economy. At Tana and Trebizond there were still opportunities, although less frequent, to find silks and spices, always in demand in Europe. It was a trade whose opportunities perhaps became less certain, the risks of being robbed increased, but nevertheless we find adventurous young people who took to the Black Sea in search of business, like Giosaphat Barbaro himself.

The Venetian population tended to decrease, and mixed marriages also increased, which favored greater integration between the local population, especially Greeks and Russians, and Italians. Political uncertainties caused the volume of commercial capital to decline, which was increasingly diverted to North African ports. The merchants were subject to extraordinary taxes and duties required for the defense of Tana and for the payment of municipal expenses. The lack of funds on the part of the authorities operating *on site* was chronic in this period, and reflects three conditions that converged to create a financial crisis: the lack of adequate support from the homeland, the exponential increase in military and fiscal expenses (including taxes to be paid to the various Tatar khans who dominated the political scene), and finally the lower liquidity of the residents, also due to a progressive change in the social fabric of the Venetian community, characterized by a lesser presence of noble families.

5. Epilogue

In the middle of the century, and especially after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the Venetian presence on the Black Sea, as well as in the Aegean, appears destined to disappear. Despite diplomatic overtures and military resistance, everyone was perfectly aware that their days were numbered. Those who still had properties and invested capital tried to liquidate them and bring home whatever they could save. It was the last chapter of a story that should not be read as a capitulation, but rather as the natural consequence of political developments far beyond Venice's ability to control. If the Mongol conquest had opened the doors of the Black Sea, the Ottoman one had closed them.

The last phase of the history of Venetian Romania was marked neither by a sudden decline in trade following the disintegration of the Mongol empire nor by the destruction brought by Timur. These events gave rise to a

long process of readjustment and recomposition of trade on different bases, just as the political conditions with which the Venetians had to deal were different. While this process was evolving, always carefully followed by the Venetian state and its representatives, other dynamics were maturing that would marginalize the Black Sea and its importance in the general economy of Venice.

Among them, two trends are particularly important: on the one hand the expansion of Venice on the mainland and on the other the Mamluk opening to international traffic in North African ports corresponding to the fall of the papal bans on trading with the sultans. Both of these strategic and geopolitical shifts offered investment and profit opportunities that the Black Sea could no longer provide. Overall, during the first half of the 15th century, moments of crisis followed moments of development and prosperity which demonstrate a persistent desire not to abandon markets and areas that the Venetians had frequented for over a century and in which they were now fully integrated. However, it is also clear that the opportunities that had opened up with the Mongol conquest no longer existed.

The twilight and nostalgic tones of the story of Giosafat Barbaro, the adventurous Venetian diplomat who, while still young, went to Tana in 1436 and returned several times to Tartaria until 1452, give us the sense of the passing of an era. Recalling his conversation with a Tartar in front of the walls of Tana, Barbaro reports a phrase from his companion: «Those who have The great spaces of Asia were narrowed, the Venetians fear, build towers». they lived perched behind walls relative safety, dreaming of ³⁹ that overlooked a true "Tatar desert", once a space to explore, in riches, but which had now become inaccessible. An era was coming to an end, but another would soon open, this one also made up of navigation and trade.

Venice will not participate in this new phase of world history, but its experience on the Black Sea, as well as that of Genoa, was the prologue and the necessary historical antecedent.

¹. Pienaru, *The Timurids and the Black Sea*, p. 128.

². Niccolò De Conti's journey was included in the fourth book of Poggio Bracciolini's *Historiae de varietate Fortunee* in 1447. There were many editions of the text in the 19th century. Among the most notable are Desimoni, *Pero Tafur*, pp. 329-352; Giardina, *Travels*; Bellemo, *Cosmography and geographical discoveries*; Longhena, *Travels in Persia*; Poggio Bracciolini, *De l'Inde*. and *Le voyage aux Indes* by Nicolò de Conti.

³. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 8-9; Khvalkov *The Venetian Tana*, p. 118.

⁴. Born in 1397 and Chinggiside as a descendant of Toqa Timur, Hajji Giray established himself as khan of Crimea thanks also to the support of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. On this, see August-Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 155-156; Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, especially the

pp. 32-41.

[5.](#) Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations*, vol. I, n. 898, p. 211; Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens a La Tana*, p. 7.

[6.](#) Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens a La Tana*, p. 7; Doumerc, *La Tana au XV^e siècle*, pp. 261-263, Public, Venice and the Sea of Azov, p. 479.

[7.](#) Depuigrenet Desroussilles, *Vénitiens et Génois*, p. 115.

[8.](#) Ibid., p. 116.

[9.](#) Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 7-9.

[10.](#) Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens a La Tana*, p. 8.

[11.](#) Depuigrenet Deroussilles, *Vénitiens et Génois*, p. 116.

[12.](#) According to Marino da Mosto, the armed galley requested by Tana in Caffa to repel the Tartars would actually have been used against the Venetians themselves. Depuigrenet Desroussilles, *Vénitiens et Génois*, pp. 116-117.

[13.](#) Khvalkov, *The Venetian Tana*, pp. 113-129.

[14.](#) Skrzinskaja, *History of the Burrow*, p. 9.

[15.](#) Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 358.

[16.](#) Gorovei, *The Principality of Theodoro*, pp. 154-155.

[17.](#) Canestrini, *The Black Sea and the Italian colonies*, pp. 11-12.

[18.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. II, pp. 382-384.

[19.](#) Karpov, *The Empire of Trebizond*, p. 39.

[20.](#) See above, note 2.

[21.](#) Karpov, *Kak feniks iz pepla*, pp. 504-514.

[22.](#) The first decades of the 15th century in the Novgorod area were characterized by extreme temperatures, both hot and cold, and famines were reported in the years 1420-23. Huhtamaa, *Climatic anomalies*, pp. 562-590.

[23.](#) Karpov, *The Grain Trade*, pp. 55-73.

[24.](#) Barbaro, Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, p. 20.

[25.](#) Ibid., p.

[34](#) [26.](#) Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens à la Tana*, p. 11.

[27.](#) Ibid.

[28.](#) Ibid., p. 10.

[29.](#) Khvalkov, *The Society of the Venetian Colony of Tana*, pp. 93-110.

[30.](#) Pienaru, *The Timurids and the Black Sea*, p. 134.

[31.](#) Khvalkov, *The Commercial Significance*, pp. 137-138.

[32.](#) Khvalkov, *A Regionalization or Long-Distance Trade?*, pp. 508-525.

[33.](#) Karpov, *New Documents*, p. 34.

[34.](#) Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens à Tana*, p. 12.

[35.](#) Ibid.

[36.](#) Karpov, *New Documents*, p. 35.

[37.](#) Doumerc, *Les Vénitiens à Tana*, p. 7.

[38.](#) Pucci Donati, *Reception and assistance*, p. 559.

[39.](#) Barbaro, Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, p. 18.

II

Movements, tools and goods

8. Marco Polo, Venetian merchant in the Mongol Empire

1. *Interpretation keys*

Let's try to imagine a world made up of maritime lengths traveled by ships of relatively small tonnage - the large market galley and the thin war galley - pilot books and coastal navigation by sight without the aid of the magnetic compass, enemy ships lurking behind headlands and bays, and the stubborn defense of commercial centers on which not only the wealth but the very survival of Venice depended. This was the world of Venetian Mediterranean trade in the Levant, from the Adriatic to Constantinople, in the early 13th century. The consequences of the geopolitical changes that in a few years would lead Venetian merchants to venture beyond the Mediterranean ports and their hinterland were not yet perceived. The transformations of geographical, political and human knowledge in fourteenth-century Europe can be compared to the changes brought about by ocean navigation and colonization of America in the sixteenth century, if it were not for the fact that, contrary to the European expansion of the modern period, the opening of the Mediterranean world to Asia depended on non-European events and agents, and in particular the Mongols and their conquests in Russia, the Middle East and Asia. The Mongol discovery of Europe, we could say, led to an initial globalization that unified three continents.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, faced with the opening of these new horizons, the extraordinary story of the Polos took place, at the same time protagonists and beneficiaries of the opening of new spaces, of a new connectivity and of the potential that they disclosed. Marco Polo became the bearer of knowledge whose reception and diffusion contributed, together with the travels of Odorico da Pordenone, the memoirs of Hayton of Corico and the stories of Mandeville, to shaping the natural and human geography of an East which from

mythological and legendary became more real and concrete. How real and concrete it was we are able, today, to establish much more precisely than the readers of his time were.

The relationship between the events of Marco (and of the Polo family in general) and the opening of Venice to the Mongol world certainly cannot be interpreted according to a linear logic of cause and effect, as if it had been the *Milione* who opened Venetian eyes to the riches of Asia, and to stimulate its commercial initiative. This was certainly not the case, since neither Marco nor the members of his family established lasting relationships with the East after their return from China, and moreover he did not enjoy great fame among his own compatriots, who long questioned the truthfulness of his exploits. Nor can the diffusion of his book be attributed to the cause of an increase in trips by Italian merchants to China. Indirectly, however, Marco's experience constitutes a cardinal passage for understanding the motivations and means of the Venetian merchants, the environment in which they moved, the tools and knowledge necessary for trade with the East, and finally the cultural horizons that they opened up in contact with a multi-ethnic civilization such as the China of the Yuan dynasty.

We are unable to assess what use those who had access to the *Million* made of the knowledge conveyed by the traveller, but all we know indicates that the book's importance as a guide to Asian markets, if any, was decidedly modest. The *Milione* did not have the same function or circulation as the *Practice of Mercatura* and the *Cumanic Code*, in the sense that it was never adopted as a handbook and guide to trade with the East, despite being the bearer, in advance of any other source, of precise information and detailed on the economic and commercial geography of Mongolian Asia. First of all, the *Milione*, although written largely from a commercial perspective, was not expressly addressed to the merchant class, nor used as a direct guide to trade, also because the Polos' experience in China remained relatively isolated and largely fortuitous. But a second consideration is that Marco had aspirations that went beyond commercial utility, as demonstrated by the fact that he entrusted himself to Rusticillo da Pisa to give literary dignity to his memoirs, and therefore his work was conceived from the beginning as something different from a simple "manual". Whether this was a conscious choice or the result of contingent circumstances we cannot say with certainty, but Marco Polo certainly worked for the rest of his life to increase the fame of the book and obtain recognition. This characteristic of the *Milione*, i.e. its address to an audience that in reality did not yet exist, and which therefore makes it in some ways anomalous, was an object of frustration for Marco Polo. Nonetheless, it paved the way for other stories

and representations of Asia which, although they mixed legend and reality, made it a much closer and more visible object. The Mongols were firmly at the center of this new geographical and human universe.

What makes Marco Polo's book essential for understanding the first steps in the relationship between Venice and the Mongols is not so much its concrete impact in defining policies or stimulating contacts, but rather the illustration of the mentality of the Venetian merchant in the face of what was new and extraordinary the Asian world represented. Through the book we grasp the cultural and cognitive background that Marco Polo most likely shared with his contemporaries, in terms of education, social background, and economic interests. The merchant's knowledge was above all material and practical, but no less complex, in a world where nothing was standardized. Means of exchange, costs, prices, measurements, products, quality, varied from port to port and from market to market. Profit margins were low and risks were high. So the merchant's experience was invaluable in international traffic routes. Marco learned the trade as a young man, and soon acquired basic knowledge: reading and writing, arithmetic, and navigation. His linguistic, financial and monetary knowledge was learned during his travels, and thanks to the experience of his father and uncle, experienced merchants, who were the first to go to China in the 1360s.

At the same time, the Polos' desire to explore distant places shines through in the pages of *Il Milione*, not as representatives of an expanding state (Venice), but as enterprising merchants in search of business who by pure chance found themselves drawn into a completely unexpected. The independence of the individual merchant and his activities from the interests and intentions of the state was successful, for the Polos as well as for many who followed them, thanks solely to the privileges and protection granted to them by the Mongol governors. Free movement permits and guarantees of compensation were provided to foreign merchants to encourage their activities by reducing, if not completely eliminating, risks. Foreigners who operated in Mongolian lands, therefore, to enjoy this protection, placed themselves at the service of the Mongolian lords, and the Polos were, in this, true precursors. A dispassionate reading of the *Milione* clearly shows how all the possibilities taken in the various journeys and movements were the expression of a privilege or permission granted by the Mongolian authorities.

The description of the relationship between Marcus himself, the khan, and the court entourage certainly reflects conventions and norms valid throughout the empire. This is not just a relationship, so to speak, of trust, as one can imagine was that of ambassadors and missionaries who went to the Mongol court with specific instructions. Marco Polo was *directly* in the service of the Mongols, and as such

position gained privileges precisely because it was inserted into a hierarchical structure that placed him in direct and exclusive contact with the khan and the aristocracy. His disinterest in the Chinese language, which to some modern commentators seems unlikely to the point of being taken as evidence of a more general lack of credibility, is perfectly compatible with an almost absolute lack of contact with a population (the Chinese) that at the Qubilai Khan's era had little political presence and low social status. Unlike the other great communicator of Chinese civilization in the West, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who lived three centuries later, Marco Polo was not interested in, nor was he prepared for, a religious or intellectual comparison with Chinese culture, which remained a stranger to him. Chinese was not the lingua franca of the environments in which Marco Polo moved, which were instead dominated by Turkish and Persian, as well as Mongolian. Toponyms and other terms in foreign languages reported in the *Million* demonstrate a proximity to these languages rather than to Chinese. It is therefore these two characteristics - the attention to mercantile material and the personal relationship with the Mongols - that seem to us to constitute the main key to understanding Marco Polo in the history of Venetian expansion in the Mongol empire.

2. *The Polos in China*

As we have seen, in Europe, by around 1260, the apocalyptic terror generated by the first Mongol invasions had already given way to curiosity and exploration, which the Mongols seemed to encourage. European sovereigns actively tried to establish diplomatic relations with them in an anti-Islamic way. It was in this climate of cautious openness that Matteo and Niccolò Polo, probably at the end of 1260, undertook a journey to the Mongol territories beyond the Black Sea, unaware of the difficulties facing the Mongol dominions, which in Russia and Persia (as also in Mongolia and China) became the theater of fratricidal conflicts. And it was precisely the civil war between Berke, lord of the Golden Horde, and Hülegü, conqueror of the caliphate, which prevented the Polos from returning to their bases on the Black Sea. This political situation is at the root of a series of events as extraordinary as fortuitous events that took the Polo brothers far beyond their initial intentions.

Having reached Berke's court in Bolghar, not far from Saraj, in the lower Volga, the khan received them with the generosity usually granted to merchants, who, due to hostilities, were unable to return to Soldaia, where they had left. So they decided to continue eastward and enter Central Asia. TO

Bukhara, in today's Uzbekistan, which was then a thriving mercantile center, they stopped for three years, always waiting to be able to return. Let's imagine that here, in the heart of the Mongol empire, they had had the opportunity to acquire precious information not only on trade but also on the political situation that was taking shape. Presumably between 1263 and 1264 they met a Mongol noble sent by Hülegü to the court of his brother Qubilai, who had in the meantime become Great Khan. The Polos, seizing the opportunity with a sense of business as well as adventure, joined the nobleman and the following year (probably 1265) arrived in the presence of Qubilai. It is probable that the meeting between the Polos and the Mongol ruler took place in the city located in today's Inner Mongolia built by Qubilai in 1256 and renamed Shangdu in 1264 (the Upper Capital, known in literature as Xanadu), and that Marco Polo himself will visit in 1275. Shangdu was the political center from which Qubilai controlled both northern China and the rest of Mongolia. The khan extended generous hospitality to the Polos, and as was his custom he questioned them about rulers, governments, laws, military strategies, the Pope, the Roman Church and the habits and customs of the Latins. The conversation apparently took place without the use of interpreters, in Turkish and Tatar (i.e. Mongolian) languages, which the Polos had evidently learned during their years of residence in Bukhara. This is an important detail as we know how the lack of linguistic knowledge had been an obstacle in previous attempts at communication between Christian missionaries and Mongol rulers. And we are already beginning to glimpse a new European attitude, made up of vast experiences in the field, which favored direct communication, although the use of interpreters (dragomans or turcimans) spread later.

A relationship of mutual understanding was established between Qubilai and the Polos, which was not surprising in the attitude of the Mongols, who often demonstrated curiosity towards foreign peoples, despite the attempts to establish diplomatic relations rarely succeeding. The khan entrusted the Polos with his message (in Turkish) for the pope, and had them accompanied by one of his envoys, evidently responsible for bringing him the pope's response. In the letter Qubilai asked that one hundred wise men, educated in the Christian religion and various Western arts, be sent to his court and be able to clearly demonstrate how the Christian religion was superior to local religions. This is an interesting note, which makes us suspect Mongolian disappointment towards previous religious missions, which failed also due to linguistic difficulties. William of Rubruck, at the court of Möngke, had already participated in a dispute with representatives of other religions, but his attempts to explain the Christian religion, by his own admission, had failed. His proof

it must have seemed extremely disappointing to the Mongols, and the Christians were therefore given a second chance to explain the basis of their beliefs. Qubilai also requested a flask of oil from the lamp of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The nature of the "tribute" requested reveals that Qubilai had probably formed an idea of the Roman Church as a spiritual and intellectual power, rather than a secular one, and that he therefore intended to establish a first contact on religious and philosophical grounds.

During the return journey the Mongol noble fell ill and the Polos were forced to continue alone, albeit under the protection guaranteed by the imperial safe conducts. After three years of travel, the two brothers reached Laiazzo and from here, in April 1269, they went to Acri, a Christian bastion in Palestine, where they learned of the death of Pope Clement IV which had occurred a few months earlier, in November 1268. From Acri they returned to Venice to await the election of the new pope. In 1271, on a subsequent visit to Acre, the Polos met the papal legate Teobaldo Visconti, who shortly thereafter ascended to the papal throne as Gregory X. Only then did the Polos finally manage to obtain an answer to bring to Qubilai. This was far lower than Mongol requests; the pope gave them letters, a vial with oil from the lamp of the Holy Sepulchre, and two monks who however returned shortly after their departure, overcome by hardship. This second journey of Niccolò and Matteo Polo would leave them for seventeen years in China where in the meantime Qubilai had completed the conquest of the Song dynasty and founded the Yuan dynasty. The Polos also brought with them the young Marco (1254-1324), then seventeen, son of Niccolò. All this is told to us, in a concise and direct way, in the introductory pages of the *Milione*.

If the Polos have been recognized as precursors of Venetian expansion in the East, it is reasonable to ask what both the nature of their affairs in the Crimea and the reasons for the journey to Mongolian lands were. The starting point of the journey was Soldaia which a few decades later would become one of the main bases of Italian trade on the Black Sea. It has been hypothesized that, when Matteo and Niccolò left Venice for Constantinople and then Soldaia, they did not possess bases in neither city. ¹ The reasons given in defense of this opinion are questionable, however, since they are based on the conjecture that, if the Polos had had a base on the Black Sea before the outbreak of the war between Berke and Hülegü, which had interfered with their return to Constantinople, that's where they would go. However, Marco himself tells us that the Polo brothers were blocked in Bolghar, one of Berke's residences, on the lower reaches of the Volga, and that the road to the Black Sea, given Berke's defeat, was not safe. To get to Soldaia, they would have had to cross areas of

war in the Caucasus or in the lower Volga. In other words, the same war that blocked the return to Constantinople also prevented the passage to Soldaia.

In light of this, it seems to us that the failure of the Polos to return to Crimea is irrelevant to establish whether a member of the family, and in particular Marco "the elder", owned a *fontigo* in Soldaia before 1260, that is, before the treaty of Nymphaeum closed access to the Straits to the Venetians.

In any case, Marco "the elder" appears to have resided for a period in Soldaia, probably until 1280. Subsequently, after his probable return to Venice, his affairs and properties were managed by his son Niccolò (junior). We do not know for sure whether these deals were part of the fraternal society that united the Polos' investments in Asia, but it is probable that it was the contacts with the commercial environment in Crimea that made Matteo and Niccolò (senior) decide to undertake the journey to the East. This seems above all to be an exploratory journey aimed at getting to know Berke, acquiring merit from him (they brought him gifts of precious gems purchased in Constantinople) and therefore being able to expand their business in the territories of the Horde. In the absence of direct relations and commercial treaties with the Venetian state, the merchants' strategy was to open up a space for themselves with private investments while obtaining the protection of the local authorities. We also note from detailed studies of notarial deeds and wills of the various Polos that Mark the Elder and his son were less successful economically, a fact which probably depends on their withdrawal from investments in the Crimea around 1280. After the fall of Acre, competition intensified for the control of the Black Sea routes and, despite the truce between Genoa and Venice in 1270, there were signs of conflict, which exploded in 1291 with the second Venetian-Genoese war. Furthermore, it is precisely after 1280 that the Genoese presence in Caffa, already active in previous years, intensifies. ² There is no doubt that those years must have been full of uncertainties and risks for the Venetians, and not favorable, at least financially, to their investments in Crimea.

On the contrary, the Polo brothers who went to Asia, Niccolò the elder and Matteo the elder, accumulated respectable resources, in movable and immovable assets.

The one who benefited most from the family business was Marco "the traveller" both as heir to substantial shares of the patrimonial estate in the family community and as a private investor, acute and prudent, although not very generous. In fact, from the will and inventory of his assets there is a collection of cash, immovable property and valuables which could be defined, if not huge, as more than conspicuous.

³ Marco Polo traveled on business even after his return to Venice, but not for long. In the years following 1300,

although he continued to invest in various enterprises, Marco seems not to have moved from Venice, perhaps because he was already advanced in years (he would be fifty in 1304) but perhaps above all due to his energetic activity as a publicist of his book, of which he himself commissioned various copies which distributed to powerful and influential people, and to look after his local interests and investments.

The Polos, with their complex business relationships within and outside the family, can be taken as a model of a mercantile class whose economic foundations were trade and investments managed by true multigenerational family businesses. This type of financial organization allowed a concentration of capital to be invested in expensive and potentially profitable trips. However, the risks were considerable. Upon their return from China, a large sum of money was stolen from the Polos in Trebizond, then controlled by the Genoese. The loss led to requests for compensation that the Venetian government could have granted on the basis of values confiscated and taken from the Genoese during battles and raids. Unfortunately for the Polos, they were able to recover, after several years, only a fraction of the lost money.

It remains somewhat surprising that the Polos, although they were undoubtedly forerunners of the expansion of Latin trade in the East, did not capitalize on their geographical, mercantile and linguistic knowledge with investments in the territory of the Golden Horde at the time of the growth of Venetian trade in Tana and other Pontine settlements. In part this can be attributed to the fact that the "traveller" Marco's generation, including his younger brother Matteo and his cousins, did not seem interested in investing in those relationships with the Mongols of which their parents and Marco himself had been protagonists.

Perhaps it was Marco's character, which to many appeared angular, intent above all on looking after his own interests and increasing his own fame, that ensured that the impulse towards commercial adventures ran out along with the loss of family cohesion. It may also have been the withdrawal from the Black Sea affairs of Niccolò junior, son of Marco the elder and cousin of the traveler Marco, that hindered the possibility of new investments in those lands.

However, we believe that the first hypothesis, i.e. the dissolution of the fraternal society established by Marco's father's generation, is the most probable. The Polos seem more interested in acquiring properties in Venice, moving from the San Severo area, in the Castello district, to that of San Giovanni Grisostomo near Rialto. This fascinating alternation between journeys across immense spaces and transfers from one sestiere to another, where social class was measured on the basis of the prestige of the area and the type of dwelling, reminds us of the supreme importance of the local interests that anchor the Venetians to own city, a rule to which not even the biography of the

greatest representative of medieval exploration.

3. *Marco Polo and the Great Khan*

In relation to the khan, Marco Polo seems to enjoy a position of great privilege, given by the fact, extraordinary in itself, of having unlimited access to the court, of being able to travel far and wide throughout the country under imperial protection, and of carry out (according to Marco himself) responsible and therefore delicate and probably well-paid tasks. Marco entered Qubilai's good graces not as a representative of a state or a class, but thanks to personal merits. First, during his stay at court, he had cultivated the customs of the Mongols, had learned their language and writing (he claims to know several writing systems), and had learned to shoot a bow to the point that everyone was amazed. Furthermore, he was well-liked and was prudent and wise.

These qualities meant that Qubilai chose him for an embassy in the distant province of Caragian (from the Mongolian Karajang), part of the current province of Yunnan, in southwestern China. Knowing that he would be questioned by Qubilai about local habits and customs, he drew up a report, which he handed over to the emperor, the contents of which are reported in the dedicated section of the *Millione* . carried out by ⁴ This could be the description of the first trip to this region. Marco Polo on behalf of the khan, and is full of details of an economic nature, which we will return to.

Returning from this mission, Marco was fully taken into the emperor's service. For the next seventeen years Qubilai continued to entrust Marco with various missions around the country. Sometimes Marco also traveled on personal business, but always with the khan's approval and permission. ⁵ During his travels throughout the empire he continued to gather information, and "he took pains to know and understand everything he thought might please the khan." ⁶ This was appreciated by Qubilai, who for this reason kept Marco in a privileged position (close to himself), causing among other things the envy or in any case the disapproval of the aristocracy. The wealth of knowledge gathered by Marco, therefore, was the result of research conducted on behalf of the khan, who wanted to be made aware of the characteristics of the most remote corners of the empire. This is why Marcus obtained special favors and the freedom of movement that allowed him to explore the empire. The hypothesis that the *Millione* could be configured, at least in part, as a sort of collection of reports addressed to the emperor does not seem entirely unlikely to us .

Leaving the empire, however, was not easy. In order to leave, the Polos needed the khan's consent, not only to have an official leave, but above all to obtain adequate protection. As Marco tells us, despite the wealth they had accumulated, they were not free to leave and, worrying that the now old khan might be missing, they also feared not being able to obtain the necessary permits from his successor. It is clear from Marco's story that the three Polos had, towards the khan, a relationship that could be defined as one of subjection, in the sense that they were at the khan's service and depended on him. Repeated pleas to grant them permission to return to Venice were rejected because the khan "loved them too much" and could not accept their leaving.

It was only the good fortune of an "arranged" marriage according to Mongolian custom that allowed them to make their way back. Around 1291, three Mongol nobles arrived at the court of Qubilai charged with asking the khan on behalf of their lord, the Ilkhanid emperor Arghun - who, however, without the messengers' knowledge, had already died while they were traveling - for a new bride, given the death of the queen. Qubilai granted Princess Kökejin (a name that could be translated as "Celestina") as a consort for Arghun

⁷) but the return journey was made impossible by a new war which blocked land passage. The Ilkhanid ambassadors therefore decided to return to Persia by sea, and it was the Mongol nobles themselves who insisted that the Polos accompany them, trusting in the nautical and geographical knowledge of Marco, who had recently returned from India. It was this triple coincidence - the arrival of the Mongolian delegation, the blocking of the land route, and the choice to go by sea - that finally allowed the Polos to say goodbye to Qubilai, and in any case it should be noted that their request was linked to a service that they offered to the khan. In practice, the relationship of subjection to their Mongol lord was never questioned, nor were the Polos able to extricate themselves from this relationship except through the provision of a requested service.

This type of bond is certainly representative of a more general conception of the bond that was established between Latins and Mongols in the different parts and kingdoms of the empire, a relationship in which individuals who entered the service of Mongol aristocrats did so with the awareness of not be able to leave it except through a special and unilateral concession. For example, there has been much talk about two Italians, the Genoese Buscarello de' Ghizolfi and the Sienese Tommaso Ugi, contemporaries of Marco Polo, who respectively held the positions of *qurci* (bow bearer) and *ilduci* (sword bearer) at the court of ilkhan. ⁸ two titles indicate positions of high responsibility within the "guard of

imperial body, which not only carried out military tasks but also administrative ones. The hypothesis that Marco Polo was also part of the Mongolian imperial guard (*keshigten*) cannot be completely ruled out, and could be supported by the reference to his expertise in archery, which would suggest military training. ⁹

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The Mongols often used Latins in their expeditions, but regardless of the mercantile origins of Buscarello (merchant in Tabriz) and probably also of the Sienese, the granting of Mongol titles and their role within Ilkhanid diplomacy and administration makes them all the servants of the khan no more and no less than Marco.

¹⁰ The terms of their relationship with Arghun and Oljeitu are not known to us, but it is doubtful whether they could enter and exit Mongolian service at will. A notarial document tells us that Buscarello himself left two slaves in the service of his wife Grimaldina, but it is a modest legacy for someone who had served in the

¹¹ ambassadorial position, and raises questions about the circumstances of his service. Another Italian ambassador in the service of Ghazan was "Isolo" the Pisan, whose name was Ciolus or Zolus Bofeti di Anastasio, who served the Ilkhanids as ambassador and probably also as governor and commissioner in the Levant, but who was also probably a skilled boaster .

¹² These are people who appear and disappear from diplomatic and notarial documents, but who left no personal testimonies, and Marco Polo's fate would probably have been equally obscure, entrusted only to testamentary notes and legal documents, if not for the fortunate decision of write down your memories.

Another hypothesis put forward by historians is that Marcus served Qubilai as an *ortaq*, a Turkic-Mongol term indicating a merchant (generally Western or Middle Eastern) in the service of Mongol aristocrats in China, and as ¹³ The term itself means "associate " such equipped with government partnership. This system was formalized by Qubilai in licenses and permits. and indicates a form of 1268, and indeed it is possible that all the Polos, including Maffeo and Niccolò, were employed in this capacity. But ¹⁴ it is difficult to think that, in the imperial entourage, there were rigid role separations. Marcus, as a trusted person introduced to the court, could have traveled as an imperial envoy or ambassador, secretary, merchant, supervisor or official, depending on the mission and rank he held.

Finally, let us remember the vexed question about the alleged "governorship" of ¹⁵ Scholars Yangzhou. more or less generally have examined it thoroughly, and the Marco Polo consensus in is that Marco Polo stayed in this important city for

three years, probably between 1282 and 1284, but certainly not as governor, one of the highest and most responsible positions. That Mark was occasionally employed in the administration of the empire as an official is not in itself surprising, and the difficulties of interpretation result mostly from contrasting readings of different manuscript traditions. What we can say is that, at the age of twenty-eight, Marco was entrusted with tasks that allowed him to come into direct contact with various offices that dealt with tax and commercial issues, and which explains his descriptive precision.

Ultimately, all the hypotheses on Marco Polo's position towards the khan are made plausible by the existence of a range of possibilities attested by contemporary sources on the presence of Latins at the Mongol courts. We must therefore not confuse the extraordinary nature of the literary legacy with the presumed extraordinary nature of Marco Polo's position in China. Marco and the Polos in general shared the fate of other Latins who entered the good graces of the Mongol lords not as representatives of their states but as individuals, and carried out governmental tasks thanks to their knowledge and (it is presumed) appreciated qualities in the commercial and diplomatic fields, or military. There is no doubt that their loyalty to the khan had to be absolute and exclusive, but what their freedom was in leaving the service and bringing their belongings and knowledge back to their homeland, we cannot know with certainty. Marco's story, if representative of the relationships between the Mongol khans and their Western servants, would leave us thinking of a difficult dissolution. This difficulty would perhaps explain the scarcity of personal information on other men who, although they held authoritative positions, did not have the opportunity to record and transmit their experiences. If the *Millione* is truly a unique work, it is so because the circumstances of its creation, and not Marco's experience itself, were completely singular and fortuitous.

4. Marco Polo's commercial geography

In the China described by Marco, distant provinces were connected to each other in a whole made organic by trade: the rivers and canals that connected the cities on their banks, and the fleets that transported all sorts of goods, were the lifeblood of the empire. It is not surprising that it is a Venetian who describes in a precise, meticulous and punctual way the symbiosis between trade and navigation. In this Marco Polo found himself in an environment familiar to him, which allowed him to penetrate into the detail of the matter with

naturalness, without mental efforts or complex translation operations which, for those who were not skilled in the profession, would have been almost impossible. This is also evident from recent studies, which demonstrate how information on coins, duties and commercial data is difficult to read for those who do not have a mercantile culture capable of interpreting them. Ultimately, it is precisely this lack of historical knowledge that fueled the controversy (now completely resolved) over Marco's presence in China. In this we owe a debt of gratitude to Hans Ulrich Vogel, who reconstructed the commercial knowledge contained in the *Milione*, and in particular that relating to coins, salt, and taxes with great precision. Only through the skills of an economic historian of China and the medieval world can we understand and appreciate Marco's knowledge.

The concept of "merchant geography" provides us with two interpretative categories (geography and trade) that allow us to connect, albeit imperfectly, to the mental world of a young Venetian of the mid-13th century, who absorbs and memorizes what he sees through filters specific to its era and culture.

If it is true that Marco's intention was not to write a trading manual, but to transmit "wonders", it is also true that the cultural substratum is that of a merchant who reads reality through codes from which he cannot escape, regardless of one's literary ambitions and self-congratulatory intentions. Finally, Mark's anxiety to be believed by the Western reader should be noted. Efforts are wasted to underline the truthfulness of the information reported, and this commitment to "credibility" should perhaps also be attributed to the dry and detached character of the descriptions, partly embellished by Rustichello, who adapts the material to the style in vogue at the time. But the reports on countries and customs seem like readings reported from a documentary hodgepodge, which, as we mentioned above, could have been a collection of travel diaries and reports to the emperor kept by Marco, perhaps written in one of the various languages he knew. In Ramusio's edition reference is made to "memorials" that Marco Polo compiled during his travels.

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¹⁷ This is an apocryphal insertion, not corroborated by manuscript tradition, but nevertheless suggestive. If in thirteenth-century Europe notebooks or notebooks in which merchants or travelers wrote diaries or took travel notes were a rarity, in thirteenth-century China this was common among literati.

Anyone who knew how to write could equip themselves with paper, ink and brush to take travel notes. Diaries and *biji*, or notebooks of notes and memoirs, were already widespread during the Song dynasty (960-1279). A suggestive hypothesis, to which Ramusio's adverts can be traced back, is that Marco has

preserved his "memoirs" and that these may have been in some way a source of data and figures present in his book. Although entirely speculative, this hypothesis would make the *Million* the result of a combination of writing and memory, and the notes that Marco had taken probably concerned the most technical and complex aspects: the distances, the figures, the exchange equivalences, and the metrological issues. To present in a succinct but not superficial way the richness and precision of information that we find in the *Milione*, we will limit ourselves to illustrating three passages representative of the set of knowledge that Marco Polo transmits to us, and in particular of the mercantile one.

5. *The city of "Cambaluc" and paper money*

Marco Polo's Cambaluc, or Khanbaliq, was the capital of Qubilai Khan's China, today's Beijing (then called Dadu in Chinese). More than on other occasions, Marco was impressed by the traffic of people and goods, coming from distant countries and from every province of "Catay". These goods served to supply primarily the sovereign and the court, but also all the resident aristocrats and soldiers quartered around the city. Every day at least a thousand carts of silk entered the city, including gold-threaded silk much appreciated by the Mongols, who enormously increased its production. Silk was even more common than hemp and cotton. This is where the imperial mint

was located, where paper money was manufactured.

The emperor is compared, by Mark, with an ironic spirit, to an alchemist who invented a kind of philosopher's stone, a process capable of transforming something of little value such as the bark of the mulberry tree into gold and pearls. The secret was paper made from the inner pulp of this bark. The sheets were cut into pieces of various sizes, and stamped with the emperor's red seal, making each piece a legal tender note, which the khan exchanged for gold, silver and any other precious stone. The different denominations had different values and were equated to the medium large Venetian silver, the large one, or even two large ones. Although the cost of producing this currency was negligible, it allowed the khan to purchase anything he wanted, as it was mandatory to accept it in payment.

Marco Polo is the medieval author who provides us with the most complete picture of the manufacture and circulation of paper money and its value. In 1260, once he ascended the imperial throne, Qubilai Khan initiated a comprehensive monetary reform which imposed the use of paper money on the territory he governed, which included northern China and Mongolia. The main stimulus goes

sought in the scarcity of silver or other monetary means that could satisfy the enormous expenses, especially military, of an expanding empire. Marco Polo does not say this, and perhaps he does not know it, but he is precise in describing the system, also providing equivalences (however approximate) between the various denominations and types of banknotes and the coins current in the West, in particular the large Venetian one in silver, the *dernier tournoir* (*tornesel*) also in silver, and the bezant in gold. Even the inhabitant of one of the richest cities in Europe could not fail to be dazzled by the infinite riches of the Great Khan and by the ingenious mechanism that allowed their accumulation.

Marco sings the praises of this system, which allowed one to travel without weighing oneself down with money, and in fact a banknote worth ten bezants barely weighs as much as one (a gold bezant weighed 4.5 grams). Foreign merchants, and particularly numerous were those who arrived from India, had to sell their valuables, such as gold, silver, gems and pearls, to the emperor who had them valued by experts and then compensated the merchants with a generous equivalent value in banknotes, which was immediately accepted as it was higher than the sum they would have received on the free market. With these means they could purchase anything they wanted and bring it back to their countries.

Periodically the khan announced that anyone in possession of valuables could take them to the mint to obtain a favorable exchange rate. In this way the khan accumulated fabulous treasures. Furthermore, if a banknote was damaged it could be taken to the mint and exchanged for a new one upon payment of a commission of 3% of its nominal value. Finally, aristocrats who needed precious objects for personal use could draw up a list, go to the mint, where they were stored, and purchase them by paying in paper money. Although the Song (960-1279) and Jin (1115-1234) dynasties had previously made use of paper monetary instruments as a substitute for metal coinage, it was the Mongols who made paper money the main means of exchange and imposed it on the empire. , although, as we will see, other forms of payment prevailed in some southern provinces.

How did this mechanism work? If trade was the engine that allowed money to circulate, the khan himself was seen as the fulcrum and anchor of the monetary system, as he was the one who promulgated very severe laws to punish both the refusal to accept banknotes and counterfeiting.

The public order that reigned in the Mongol regimes, although imposed by the sword, was essential to the maintenance of a financial, commercial and fiscal order based on a purely symbolic instrument, whose value was guaranteed solely by the existence of a state able to impose its use, but also to maintain the infrastructure necessary for the production and circulation of

banknotes, including paper processing, printing, checking and accounting.

Marco gives us a very clear idea of their function: not only to exchange precious goods (acquired by the state) for paper money, but also to issue new banknotes and exchange them for non-precious goods such as silk and cotton fabrics. Just as the issuing of banknotes was the prerogative and monopoly of the state, so was the collection and safeguarding of valuables that both foreign merchants and private citizens exchanged for paper money. These were stored in the so-called "Stabilization Warehouses". There has been a lot of talk about the "forced exchange" of paper money in the Yuan era, but Marco Polo does not exclude, when he states that people can go to warehouses and purchase precious objects with banknotes, a form of convertibility, albeit in limited quantities.

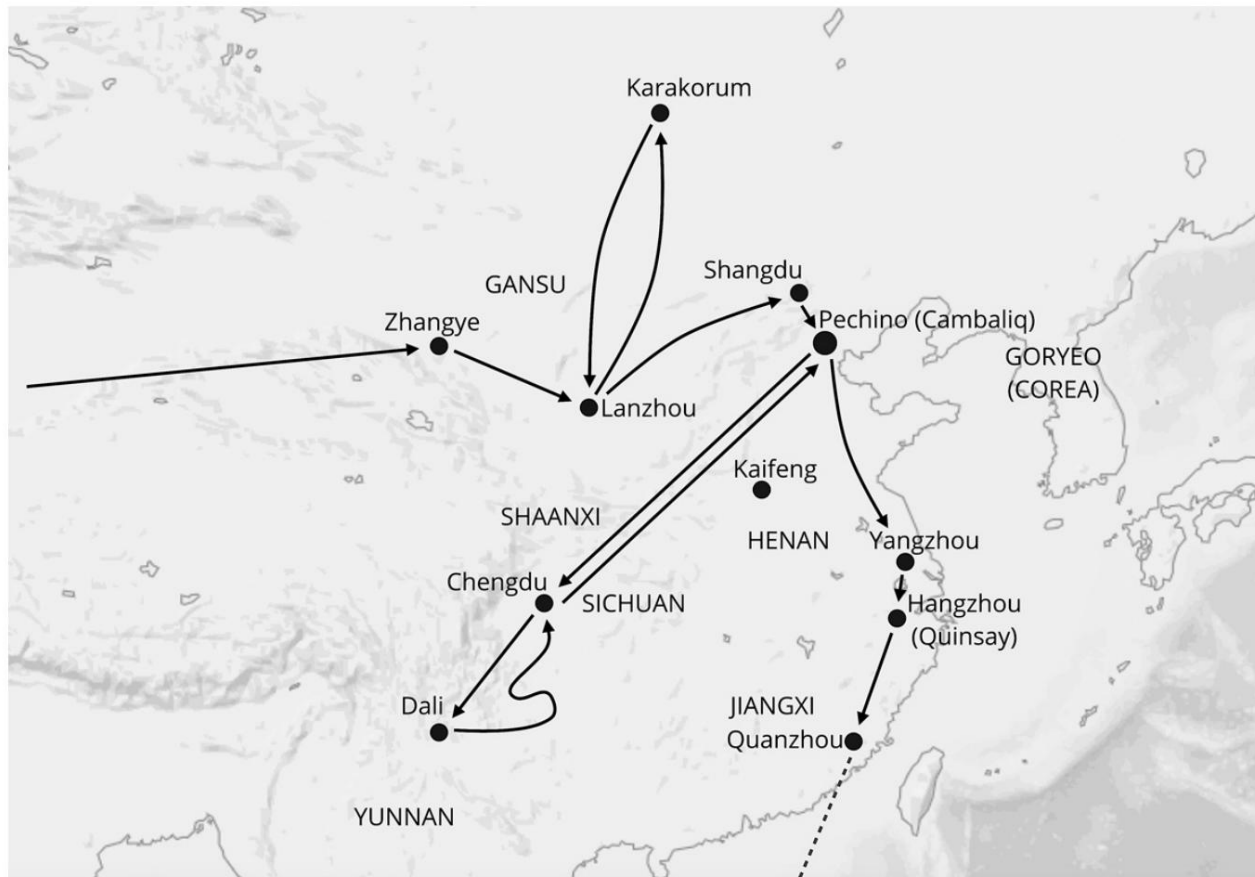
The only data that cannot be verified is the presence of twelve experts who were entrusted with the task of estimating the value in paper money of the goods. The state had access to gold, objects obtained essentially at zero ¹⁸ silver and others presented at the warehouses. precious cost, in exchange for paper. However, it is also true that, for imports from abroad, he was forced to pay in silver or gold, the obligatory currency in international transactions. Furthermore, the khan and government offices used the jewels to reward or compensate aristocrats, high officials, soldiers, and probably foreign ambassadors. All this is widely confirmed by Chinese sources, while among Marco Polo's contemporaries, who also mention paper money, we find neither the wealth nor the accuracy of the information we find in the *Milione*. Ultimately, as Vogel tells us "the comparison with Chinese sources demonstrates that Marco Polo's description of the production and functions of Yuan banknotes is in almost all cases perfectly congruent with the information we find in historiographical documents and historical remains".

19

6. Caragian province (Yunnan, Dali)

One of the very few areas where paper money does not circulate is southwest China. The modern province of Yunnan, which in the Mongol sense appears in the *Milione* as Caragian, was the place that Marco visited during his first mission on behalf of Qubilai. It is described after Sichuan (the city of Chengdu, Caidu) not according to a chronological order of travel but according to a geographical organization that follows a path from west to east – from the Black Sea to Central Asia, to Mongolia, and finally to imperial capital – and then, in the description of China, from the western provinces to the eastern ones, and then to India and Southeast Asia. It is likely that this chapter represents,

as we said above, the report presented to Qubilai. As with other narratives of places, Marco focuses on economic aspects that seemed particularly noteworthy to him. In this case, he offers us the most accurate and complete description of the use, circulation, and value of cowrie shells.



Map 1. Marco Polo's China

From a monetary point of view, the Caragian and Zardandan provinces of Yunnan are not integrated with the rest of the empire (Cathai and Manzi, i.e. North and South China). Paper money did not circulate, and cowrie shells (cauri) were instead used for small daily transactions, while gold was used for higher values. The use of shells, although anomalous compared to the monetary regime in force in the rest of the empire, was equally controlled by the government to avoid abuses linked to the illegal importation of this currency. In fact, Yunnan was much more financially integrated with Southeast Asia, and especially with India, where the shells came from. The basic unit of measurement, in this system, was the string of 80 shells, equivalent to one unit of silver, i.e. one "assay".

This equivalence gives us the possibility to establish that one ounce of Chinese silver (*liang*) was equivalent to 726 shells. Chinese sources, however, give us different and higher exchange rates, which could indicate notable fluctuations, from 960 to over 2,000 shells for an ounce of silver. On the other hand, it is precisely silver that has a particularly high value in the region, due to a supposed scarcity, while gold had a relatively low value, given the abundance of gold straws and nuggets in its streams. of water. If the abundance of gold in Yunnan [20](#) the scarcity of silver in "Zardandan" is widely confirmed by Chinese sources, (western Yunnan) is more difficult to since the end of thirteenth century until the end of accept, given that the silver exported to India the sixteenth century. According to Vogel, most of the silver mines in Yunnan were located in the eastern part of the province, and therefore this scarcity could be explained precisely by exports, as silver was exchanged abroad for gold at a very favorable exchange rate. [21](#)

There are many similarities between Marco's story and what we learn from Chinese sources. He confidently identifies the origin of the cowries (Bengal), the accounting measurement of eighty shells, and the absence of paper money, the only exception in the entire empire. Furthermore, the regions from which in 1301 an imperial edict prohibited the illegal importation of shells were the same places mentioned by Marco. Historical sources and archaeological findings confirm this same "economic geography", and here we have proof that, on his journey to Carajan, Marco had diligently fulfilled the khan's request to bring him [22](#) reliable information.

— If Marco focuses on economic, monetary and commercial issues, this is due to his cultural background and the technical tools that allow him to decode complex aspects of the local economy and trade.

[23](#) 7. The city of Quinsai (Hangzhou)

The chapter on the city of Kinsay or Quinsai is particularly important as it provides us with another detailed example of Marco Polo's knowledge of financial matters. [24](#) The description presents a general picture of exuberant productivity and economic well-being evidenced for example by the abundance of silk. But Marco also points out the massive military presence and the surveillance to which the local population was subjected. Each of the city's 12,000 bridges (that's how many there are) was monitored by guards who monitored people's movements and ensured compliance with the curfew.

evening. The reason why the khan kept the city under tight control is twofold.

On the one hand, Hangzhou was the capital of the recently "pacified" southern China (Manzi). On the other hand it was a very important collection center for the tax revenue generated by commercial taxes.

The revenue relating to the production of salt sales in the distribution area of which Hangzhou was the center was calculated on the basis of an equivalence between the *toman* (*tümen* in Mongolian means 10,000) and the gold "assay". The value of a *toman* is given, depending on different versions of the *Million*, at 70,000 or 80,000 sages, so the revenue relating to salt would have amounted to 5,600,000 or 6,640,000 sages. These were nominal values in gold, but the collections were in paper money. The exactions of the Hangzhou treasury included, apart from those on salt, also other types of taxes, for example on silk produced by family factories, on grain, and on other products such as alcohol and vinegar. The extraction of minerals – copper, iron, aluminium, lead, gold and silver – was also subject to taxes, as was the cutting of bamboo and timber. The proceeds correspond, in Marco's report, to 210 *tomans*, which would be equivalent to 14,700,000 gold sages: an enormous figure, which, like many other statements that seemed exaggerated, meant that Marco's book earned, in fact, the nickname "Million". But by comparing these figures with information obtained from Chinese sources, and reducing both to the same unit of measurement (bearing in mind that conversion rates were subject to fluctuations), we obtain a range of figures which, in the case of Chinese sources, ranges from 469,799 to 906,040 ounces of silver, and in the case of Marco Polo from 554,210 to 818,362, which ²⁵ No other source cites the taxes, so they are perfectly compatible. of which we find mention in any case only in the works of the Persian historian Wassaf (d. ca. 1328) and in the travel report of Odorico da Pordenone, approaches the precision of Marco Polo. This verification therefore confirms the fact that Marco offices of Hangzhou (the Salt Distribution Commission) had direct experience in the tax accounting Commission was created by the Mongol government in 1277-78), probably as a Supervisor sent directly by the khan.

8. Venice in China: a missed opportunity?

Today we know that Marco Polo's memoirs are more precise in the description of material life and economic and financial conditions than in the descriptions of political episodes, or information of a social and cultural nature. This leads us to suppose that the *Million* is the result of a long experience of

I work with tasks of a predominantly economic nature. Probably Marco himself, as we have already hypothesized, carried out commercial activities either on his own behalf and that of his family, or as *an ortaq* for the khan and aristocratic families. The mercantile knowledge, which was the ordinary endowment of any young Venetian raised in a family dedicated to commerce, and his personal attitude, which reveals a particular curiosity and attention to financial mechanisms, form the framework of the book itself. Furthermore, the *Milione*, created to describe a new world, is completely compatible with the experience, shared by Marco with other Latins, of a service, sometimes diplomatic, sometimes administrative, sometimes military, rendered to the Mongol rulers at the moment which they became the masters of Asia. In *Milione* one can perfectly perceive the Mediterranean merchant's commitment to identifying and defining markets and mechanisms to which he had access thanks to the Mongols. This overlap of roles, now merchants, now ambassadors and now officials in the service of the khan, unites the Polos with their contemporaries, and gives us a glimpse of an important aspect of the Venetian, and more generally Latin, presence among the Mongols: that of the enterprise private, which is characterized by personal initiative and journeys dictated by often fortuitous circumstances.

In the next chapters we will talk about those tools that allowed the Venetians to penetrate the markets controlled by the Mongols, tools based primarily on the enormous effort to make different commercial cultures compatible. These aspects belong not only to the sphere of individual knowledge, but are part of a collective effort that includes many elements: the estimation of goods and markets, the knowledge of geography and routes, the convertibility of currencies, weights and measures, the calculation of risks and dangers. Gradually, the accumulated experience was transformed into the ability to project Venetian activities, as an enterprise no longer limited to individuals and families, but which involved the community of the state, beyond the Mediterranean borders, and to establish a direct relationship with the nerve centers of the Mongol Empire.

Reflecting on the role of Marco Polo and his book, we realize the significant fact that although *Il Milione* represents an enormous contribution to the knowledge of Asia, its influence in the general context of relations between Venice and the Mongols was almost non-existent. The Polos were private citizens who played no official role in Venetian expansion in Asia. If Venice was present on the Black Sea as a Mediterranean power, this is not equally true for China, which however remained outside the range of action or interest of the Venetian government. Never were official delegations sent to attempt to lay the foundations for an organized presence like the one that existed on the Black Sea. Nor did the Venetian state establish diplomatic relations with

Mongol khans other than those of the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate, that is, the rulers of the places where they established significant presences. Nor can the Mongols be accused of having closed the road to Cathay opened by the Polos, since they had always shown themselves welcoming and had indeed encouraged diplomatic initiatives. If the extraordinary adventure of the Polos can be considered a particularly fruitful episode in the relations between Europe and China, it was partly for absolutely random reasons, but above all because the Mongols had opened the doors to communication with Asia.

- [1.](#) Jacoby, *Marco Polo*, pp. 193-218.
- [2.](#) Balard, *Gênes et la mer Noire*, pp. 31-54; Balard, *Les Génois en Crimée*, pp. 201-217.
- [3.](#) Jacoby, *Marco Polo*, pp. 1-68.
- [4.](#) See the various editions of Marco Polo's work cited in the bibliography.
- [5.](#) Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. Moule, Pelliot, vol. I, pp. 16-17.
- [6.](#) *Ibid.*, 17.
- [7.](#) Francis Cleaves, while recognizing that the name derives from the Mongolian *köke*, which in its most common meaning means blue, blue-green, light blue or light blue (still present in the toponyms Kokonor and Huhhot) opts for "dark" (and therefore "woman dark-skinned") despite this being a rarely attested meaning. Light blue was a sacred color to the Mongols, and therefore had divine and spiritual associations that could be associated with a personal name. Cleaves, *A Chinese Source*, pp. 181-203.
- [8.](#) Lockhart, *The Relations*, pp. 23-31; Richard, *Buscarello de Ghizolfi*, vol. IV, p. 569.
- [9.](#) On the hypothesis that Marco had been employed in the imperial bodyguard, see Haw, *Marco Polo's China*, pp. 165-68.
- [10.](#) Jackson, *World Conquest and Local Accommodation*.
- [11.](#) Balard, *Gênes et la Mer*, pp. 379-80.
- [12.](#) Richard, *Isol le Pisan*, pp. 186-194.
- [13.](#) Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, pp. 75-76.
- [14.](#) Endicott-West, *Merchant Associations in Yüan China*, p. 133.
- [15.](#) Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, pp. 348-364.
- [16.](#) Jackson, *Marco Polo*, pp. 82-101.
- [17.](#) Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. Moule, Pelliot, vol. I, p. 73.
- [18.](#) Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, pp. 167-168.
- [19.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- [20.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 243-248.
- [21.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 49, Yule-Cordier, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, vol. II, pp. 85 et seq.
- [22.](#) On cowrie shells as a means of payment in various parts of the ancient world, and in particular on its use in Yunnan at the time of Marco Polo, see Bin, *Cowrie Shells*, pp. 94-123.
- [23.](#) Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, pp. 364-398.
- [24.](#) On Kinsay see also *The Travels of Marco Polo*, ed. Yule, Cordier, vol. II, pp. 185-218.
- [25.](#) Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, p. 375.

9. An interconnected continent

1. *The Venetian merchant and the new horizons of trade*

During the years of Venetian expansion into the Mongol Empire, the merchant's profession changed radically. The expansion of markets and the need to operate far from the homeland undoubtedly had an impact on the transition from the itinerant merchant - a person who travelled, bought, sold and took on the entire risks of his activity - to the sedentary entrepreneur of the 14th century, head of a company with agents spread across the main squares

of Europe and the Levant.¹

Many of the processes of evolution in mercantile practice already in motion in the previous decades came to maturity during the 13th century, during which Venice had made enormous efforts to build an "Aegean system" that would guarantee continuity of circulation for goods and people from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. From the end of the 13th century, the growing presence of the Venetians in the lands under Mongol rule had opened up new markets, and at the same time required the state to participate in commercial expansion. The long distances, the high risks, and the time required for navigation required large, long-term investments. For this reason, financial resources came largely from the higher classes and wealthier sectors of Venetian society. A more organic integration was therefore created, east of Constantinople, between merchant and state. Traveling on the Romania-Black Sea galleys we find above all members of the city aristocracy, headed for Tana, Tabriz and all the other places of the Black Sea, who on the one hand do business and on the other hold government positions, without that there was a clear separation between the two activities.

Venice fed on trade, and drew its fortune from it. From the beginning of the 13th century its expansion first into the eastern Mediterranean, and then beyond

Dardanelles, made it the natural hub of Eurasian trade: the arrival point of the goods that arrived from the East and which then radiated towards European squares, making it the great emporium of Europe. It was a system that guaranteed wealth to the city and well-being to its citizens, but not all Venetians could enjoy its proceeds to the same extent, given that participation in mercantile activities depended on an individual's social condition within a rigidly stratified society. .

In thirteenth-century Venice, anyone who wanted to practice trading had to belong to a very specific social category: that of *citizens*, which included the middle-upper classes and in any case no more than 5% of the population.

² Citizens were the members of the great Venetian families of ancient ancestry (*originarii*) but also those who, having emigrated to Venice, resided there permanently and paid taxes (*de intus et de extra* or *de fora*). ³ The state legally protected its merchants, at home and abroad, and intervened in disputes between merchants, between merchants and producers, between merchants and buyers, and so on to ensure the smooth functioning of commercial mechanisms.

Production and trade were clearly separated, but the collaboration between those who produced (often a commoner) and those who traded was very close. The merchant in fact supported the costs of various artisan trades by assuming the rental costs, or directly supplying the raw materials, as for example in the case of furs that arrived from Russia to Venice to be processed *on site* and then sold throughout Europe, or of the cotton that Venice imported from

Syria and Egypt. ⁴ In other words, the merchant was separated from the direct production of consumer goods, but the expansion of the scope of his activity, and therefore the exponential increase in the supply of raw materials and the sale of finished products, was an indispensable factor for the expansion of production activities in Venice and elsewhere. Furthermore, Venetian commercial activities in Constantinople, Egypt, Syria and throughout the Middle East had stimulated the development of regional markets, connecting them to commercial arteries that not only branched out into the Mediterranean basin but were also the terminals of Asian routes that they extended as far as India and China.

The Mongol conquest had enormously increased the possibilities for trade, not only due to the greater accessibility of the markets but above all due to the attitude that we could almost define as an *ante litteram* "liberalism" of the Mongolian governments. The khanates constituted a coherent political system, even if not unified from an administrative point of view, which gave the Venetian commercial apparatus, and the Mediterranean in general,

the opportunity to connect with territorial and economic areas that were previously inaccessible or at least accessible only through intermediaries. At the same time, the process of integration of regional economies with large international trade, already underway since the previous century, accelerated. ⁶ In other words, the Mongol conquests widened the merchants' room for maneuver and facilitated their operations by regularizing commercial tariffs and limiting if not eliminating the risks of robbery. For example, the sources show beyond any doubt the relative safety of the "via della Tana" in the first half of the 14th century.

– Already from the second half of the thirteenth century, merchants were able to accurately quantify the costs associated with transport, duties and risks of long-distance trade and on this basis calculate investments and profit margins.

To facilitate and support the presence and activities of Venetian merchants in the new areas of commercial expansion, from the second half of the 13th century shipbuilding skills were refined, navigation techniques improved, the frequency and regularity of journeys increased, and with them the knowledge of the territory, and public investments also increased. In this chapter we will focus above all on trade routes, on innovations in shipbuilding, and on the legal instruments that favored investments through the formation of mercantile associations of various kinds.

As regards logistical support for land travel, the spread of mendicant orders in Asia - Franciscans and Dominicans - made possible thanks also to the religious tolerance of the Mongols, led to the creation of reception facilities which merchants also used. The Franciscan warehouse in Zaitun (Quanzhou, in southern China) is one of these examples, but in every Venetian settlement far from the homeland, churches, confraternities, schools, vegetable gardens and craft workshops managed by the mendicant orders arose. The Venetian merchants active in Tana opened taverns, acquired mills, and managed bakeries. Even in terms of daily life and the meeting between religions, the Black Sea became the summit of routes that connected the Latin West to the Mongolian East and the Islamic world.

Leaving the European cultural sphere, dominated by Latin and Greek, also meant finding a new *koine* and alternative linguistic tools. Among these, Persian and Turkish stood out, already widespread as *lingua francas* in the East, which were used by Western merchants above all on long journeys. However, it was advisable to rely on intermediaries and interpreters, although not always reliable. In the Mongol Empire the Venetian merchant, like all those who frequented these routes, apart from the vernacular language, used at least three others, namely Latin, Persian and Turkish. As well as being multi-ethnic, the Black Sea was

a polyglot world.

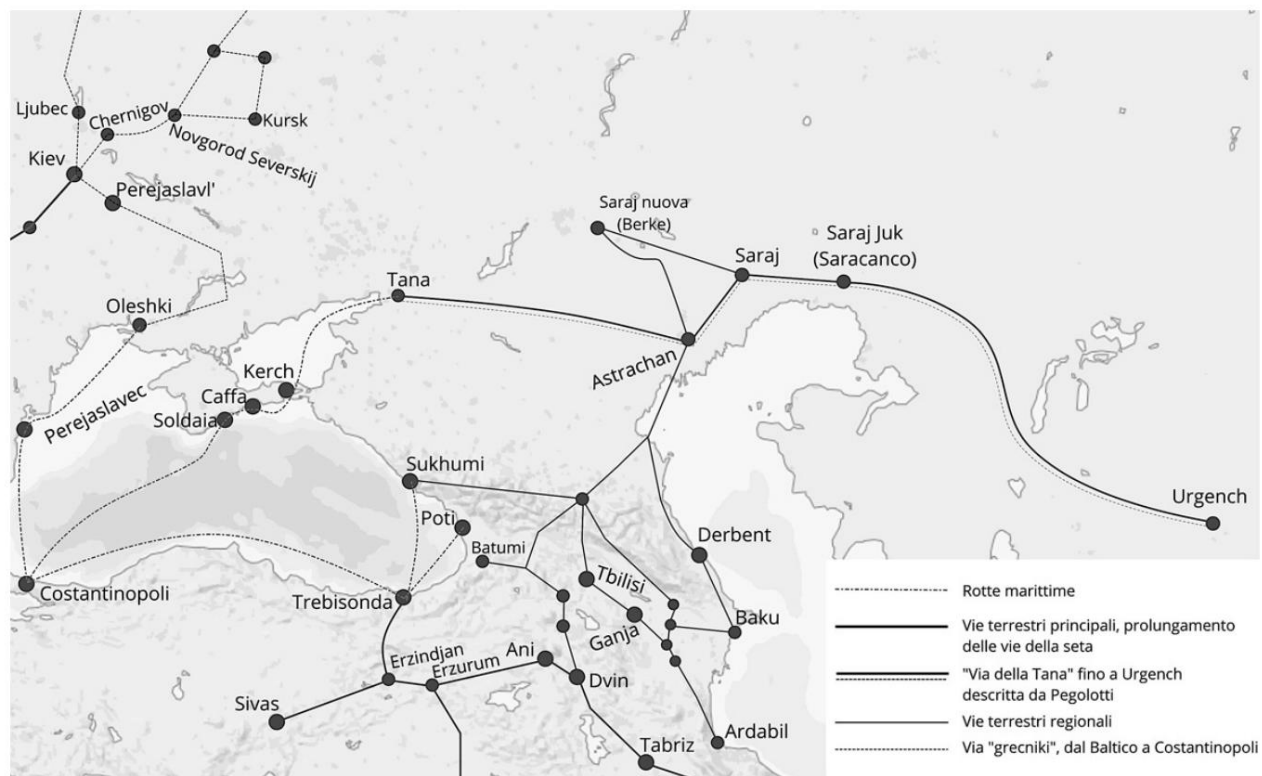
Let us also consider that in the fourteenth century it took 284 days, nine and a half months, to go from Tana to *Cathay*, considering the variability of climatic conditions, natural obstacles, including deserts and mountain chains, and the possibility of encountering war zones. Among the risks there was also the possibility of being attacked and robbed during the journey. In other words, it was an experience full of deprivation and sacrifice, and required an adventurous spirit and adequate knowledge.

In official communications and private Venetian writings, Latin remained the first language, but in the fourteenth century the use of the vernacular made its way alongside the bureaucratic language and replaced it both in private mercantile writings and, less often, in official treaties. Furthermore, beyond the needs of transport and linguistic communication, coming into contact with a new commercial world, one had to deal, as we have already seen in the case of Marco Polo, with commensurability and equivalences in the means of exchange, from money to weights and measures. Ensuring the mutual readability of tools essential to mercantile activity is a concern that the mercantile manuals amply testify to. In the following chapters we will look at these aspects of overseas trade which necessarily fall within the set of problems of exchange and cultural contact between Europe and the Mongol Empire.

Finally, the financial instruments necessary to encourage the circulation of money and protect investments must be mentioned. Innovations in the banking and commercial fields such as the bill of exchange and insurance policies, although less widespread in Venice than in other Italian areas, were probably stimulated precisely by the need to access increasingly distant markets and face greater risks. Commercial investments were based on an integrated system between government, merchant, investor and credit agencies centered in Venice on the times of the *mude* for the Black Sea, and in Crimea, Tana or Trebizond on the presence of the "banks" that operated on site. To attract investments in the starting periods of the *mude*, which were regulated by the Municipality, the cost of money was lower than in "off-the-street" locations. Companies and banks, especially Florentine ones, together with private investors, flocked to Venice in the weeks preceding the departure of the market galleys to offer credit services. Merchants and shipowners in search of liquidity could obtain capital on credit from banking companies, which they would then repay with interest upon returning from the voyage. The credit agencies had earning opportunities not only due to the interest on the capital, but also due to the variations due to the exchange between the currencies in circulation⁸ To finance longer trips,

merchants brought with them goods that were immediately profitable and easy to transport, especially precious ones. Thus, when in 1250 Niccolò and Matteo Polo set sail from Constantinople to "pass the Great Sea", or cross the Black Sea, they had to buy many jewels "to carry" which were needed to access the court of the Khan of the Golden Horde Berke. ⁹ Upon return, the earnings made on overseas trips were expressed in various currencies which required a complex system illustrated in manuals such as that of Pegolotti.

Settlement defense and risk reduction were also essential ingredients to make mercantile activities possible. The Venetian emporiums on the Black Sea, and in particular those located in the Mongol territories, were distant from the motherland, and their protection was entrusted to the small forces of local garrisons. Genoa certainly created more effective defensive structures, in Caffa and other colonies, while the Venetian settlements remained extremely vulnerable. The Venetian documentation informs us extensively about the defensive structures of Tana and the expenses incurred to guarantee a regular influx of weapons and men, but it was above all after the destruction by Tamerlane in 1395 that substantial investments were approved for the construction of new fortifications and for the maintenance of a regular garrison. Venice relied above all on the defense of the seas and diplomacy, which entailed lower expenses but greater risks. In any case, these measures were generally insufficient to protect their citizens from external threats, be they Mongolian or Genoese. But the strictly defensive and military aspect was less important than the legal one, which allowed Venice (as well as Genoa) to rely on the Mongol authorities to protect the interests and safety of its fellow citizens. On the trade routes, the so-called *pax mongolica* defined the set of rules, contained in treaties and agreements between states, which regulated the relationship between Mongols and merchants, and, offering protection, reduced risks and allowed a realistic forecast of profit.



Map 1. The main trade routes in the northern sector, Black Sea-Caspian Sea-Central Asia

2. Eurasian trade routes

Whether traveling by sea or following land routes, covering the entire communications network that we know as the “Silk Road” required long times and high costs. Merchants arrived on merchant galleys at Trebizond or Tana and continued overland to Asia. The bases of Latin trade in North Pontus were connected to the north with the steppes of southern Russia, and to the east with Central and Eastern Asia. ¹⁰ The transit system was formed between the mid-13th and early 14th centuries, and functioned through a chain of stages that unfolded along itineraries dictated not only by geography, but above all by the new geopolitical and commercial configuration created by the Mongols. This system was substantially divided between two main itineraries, southern and northern, and a third less frequented one which we could call central.

The southern route had its nerve center in Tabriz, the terminal of trade with the Mongolian Middle East ever since the Ilkhan Abaqa chose that city as his residence. You arrived in Tabriz from Laiazzo or Trebizond, sometimes also from Samsun by land. From Tabriz to Trabzon yes

they took from twelve to thirteen days of travel on horseback and without carts, and "from 30 to 32 days of caravan pack".

¹¹ This was, in all probability, the most used itinerary until the 1440s, given that it is the only one described in great detail - station after station - by an and before that and by Marco Polo, while it is completely absent in the Venetian *Tarifa*, composed a few decades later, and in any case not before ^{14th} 1345. ¹² attentive commercial professional like Pegolotti, ¹³ by the author of *Nottario*

— This route was used in the opposite direction, from east to west, by the Nestorian monk of Chinese origin Rabban Sauma when, in 1287, he traveled ¹⁵ Also the Franciscan friar pope. ¹⁶ Odoric from Baghdad to Rome to meet the

Pordenone (d. 1331) made use of it in 1318. ¹⁷ Trebizond and Tabriz were also from

connected to Sivas (Sebaste, today in Turkey), which played an important role in commercial transits since the beginning of the 13th century, as we see from the construction of hospices for travelers built by the Seljuk sultan Kaykavus

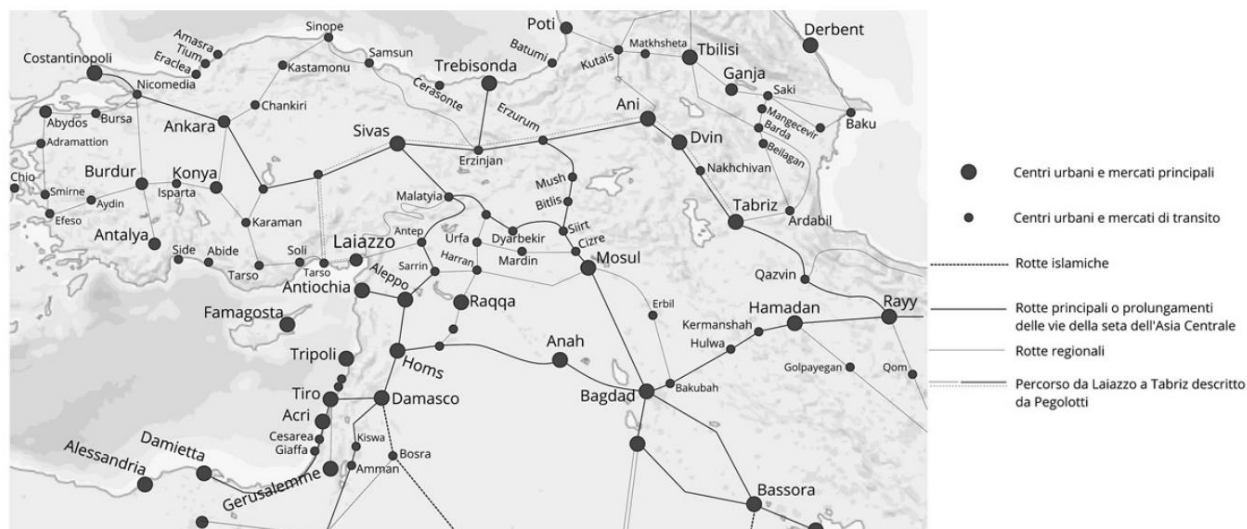
(or Kay Khusraw II, r. 1237-1246), and by the Persian vizier Muzafer in 1271-1272. ¹⁸

Due to the interdiction of the Egyptian ports, in particular that of Alexandria, Western merchants heading towards the Persian Gulf area, after passing through Tabriz, arrived in succession at Savah, Avah, Kasan, Yazd, Kirman, and finally Hormuz, Marco Polo's Cormos/Cremosu, which was the main port from which people embarked for the Far East.

¹⁹ From here the navigation continued across the Indian Ocean to Baruch and Cambay and then took the land route to China. It was a journey of at least two years and was therefore very expensive. It was from Hormuz that Odorico da Pordenone embarked ²⁰ where in 1325 he found many Venetian on the southern coast of ~~m~~erchants in Zaitun in 1322 for China, (Quanzhou), a flourishing port today's Fujian, and an important commercial port in Southeast Asia.

²¹ From Tabriz people also went to China by land, shorter but less easy, passing through Mashad, Merv, Samarkand, Kashgar and Yarkand. This was also the route used by Mongolian officers traveling from China to Iran and vice versa. ²² Finally, from

Laiazza, still passing through Tabriz, one could also reach Baghdad, bypassing Mamluk Syria.



Map 2. The main transit routes of the Ilkhanate and surrounding regions in the first half of the 14th century

Another land route, to the north, was safer but longer. From Tana it went to Astrakhan, north of the Caspian, continuing through the cities of Central Asia to Almaligh and the oases of Kashgar and Yarkand, and then, crossing the Gobi desert, it bent south-eastwards to Beijing. ²³ In the 1430s, Astrakhan was reached from Tana in twenty-five days' journey on an ox-drawn cart, while with a horse-drawn carriage the journey was shorter, ten to twelve days. The road was safe because "there are a lot of snots, that is, people with weapons", writes Pegolotti, indicating the presence of armed Mongols as a guarantee for the traveller, as they acted as escort to the caravans. The security of the routes remained high in these years, but after the death of Berdibeg (1359) travel conditions became riskier due to internal conflicts within the Golden Horde.

²⁴ From Astrakhan you had to cross the Volga, and it often took a day of river navigation to get to the next stop, Saraj. From here we continued to Saraiyik ²⁵, being able to choose whether to follow the river route or the land route. In the first case the journey was relatively short (eight days) and cheaper since the goods paid a lower tax, in the second it was longer and more expensive. From here the merchants entered Turkestan and continued to Urgench, a populous city animated by a rich market that offered merchants good earning opportunities. The journey to reach the central Asian city was long: twenty days by camel-drawn cart. From Urgench we went to Otrar with thirty-five to forty days of "camel with cart". If you did not have bulky goods it was advisable to travel directly from Saraj to Otrar without

stop in Urgench. In this case the journey was about fifty days. From Otrar the route continued to Almaligh. This stretch, lasting forty-five days of travel, required the use of a pack donkey. From Almaligh, in today's Xinjiang, we proceeded south-eastwards to "Camesu", today's Zhangye, in the Gansu corridor, with another seventy days of [26](#)

At this point we arrived in *Cathay*, sums of silver [27](#) where trips could be changed with paper money because "it is a land of mercantile". After thirty days of travel we arrived at the last stop, the capital Khanbaliq, near today's Beijing, or, in the words of Pegolotti, «the master city of the country del Gattaio», seat of the imperial mint. [28](#)

Preparations for long-term journeys included the provision of food and supplies, clothing, and even an adaptation of one's appearance to the needs of the places one would travel through. From Tana it was advisable to bring some flour and salted fish, but everything else could be purchased during the journey. To integrate with the local population it was necessary to grow a beard, and to communicate it was recommended to hire good interpreters. The retinue was limited to a few servants, while bringing women was not recommended. The traveler stopped at post stations or at villages along the road to rest, change horses, or buy foodstuffs. The post station (*yam*) system is one of the innovations of the Mongol empire, created during the conquest to ensure rapid communications over long distances. Maintained throughout the empire, this logistical system allowed couriers to cover great distances at high speed, changing horses frequently.

The very fact that Pegolotti is so specific about goods, about weights and measures, and about transit routes, confirms the impression of a substantial flow of Latin merchants to the East. Most of the time these left from Venice with the idea of stopping in a settlement manned by the Venetian authorities and not too far away, such as Trebizond, Tana, or Tabriz. Once at the destination, the commercial activity sometimes required longer journeys to get the goods in the central Asian trading cities connected to Saraj. Rarer was the case of merchants who planned long journeys right from the start, destined for deeper Asia.

A well-known and well-documented case is that of the Loredan brothers. In 1338, intending to reach Delhi, the brothers Giovanni and Paolo Loredan formed a company that also included Andrea Loredan, perhaps a cousin, Marco Soranzo, Marino Contarini and Baldovino Querini. an expert on [29](#) Giovanni Loredan was traveling to China, having already done it once years ago.

Following the recommendations of the trading manuals, Giovanni set off with fabrics that he sold along the way, keeping only cash and precious stones. The merchants left Venice for Constantinople. From here they embarked for Tana, from where they took the northern route, the one that Pegolotti described as safe day and night. They passed through Astrakhan, Saraj and Urgench. From Astrakhan you crossed the Volga in the summer by boat or in the winter by sleigh, on frozen water, never in the middle seasons. The Venetians stopped in Astrakhan for 50 days before being able to cross the river, as they probably arrived there in autumn, given that Giovanni Loredan received money to finance the journey in July, and that the expedition left shortly after.

³⁰ Once they crossed the Volga they faced the most difficult part of the journey, namely the deserts of Central Asia and the Trans-shimalay Alpine passes that would take them to India. Giovanni Loredan never reached his destination as he fell ill and died in Ghazna. The rest of the company arrived in Delhi and presented the precious items to Sultan Muhammad ibn Toghluk (r. 1325-1351), who repaid them with the enormous sum of two hundred thousand bezants. ³¹ They spent part of it on duties, on the repayment of loans they had taken out during the voyage, and on other urgent expenses. They finally invested the remaining capital, more than one hundred thousand bezants, in pearls, easily transportable and of high value. Furthermore, pearls and gems were particularly convenient since in the Mongol Empire precious stones were exempt from taxes. On the return journey they stopped again in Urgench, where the company disbanded (in the meantime Querini had also died). There is no further information, but we know that the survivors took the route to Persia and avoided passing through Tana, perhaps because they arrived there at the end of 1343 and the crisis had already broken out. In the end, the proceeds probably did not justify the high risks, long ³² travel times, and

We do not know to what extent the experience of the Loredan brothers is representative of the costs and risks that the merchants were willing to assume, but it remains indicative of the attractive force of the East, which evidently sparked hopes of fabulous profits. As we have already mentioned, it is very likely that expeditions of this nature were relatively rare. The scarcity of documents makes us think that it was more usual and profitable to exploit commercial opportunities for successive segments that stopped in Astrakhan, Urgench or Saraj, where European products were sold in exchange for Asian goods which would then be shipped from Tana for transport. 'Europe.

In the fourteenth century, to go to China there was also another itinerary, so to speak central, which was the shortest. Arriving from the port of Trabzon, we continued by land to Tabriz through the cities of Erzerum, Erzindjan, Ani and

Dvin. Once in the capital of the Ilkhanate, we continued to Mashad, in north-eastern Iran, then went up to Merv and continued to Samarkand. From here you crossed the Pamir mountain passes and crossed the Gobi desert to arrive in China. This route also presented many risks due to the difficulties of the territory and the political instability in Central Asia.

Over time the northern route took over, due to the papal ban on going to Egypt, which made the use of the southern routes more complicated, and due to conflicts between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanate, and between the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde. The end of the Ilkhanate also forced the merchants to withdraw from Tabriz from 1340 onwards, and therefore Tana gradually acquired, since its foundation, greater strategic importance as the most advanced and longest-lived emporium of the Venetian commercial system in the East.

³³ If it is true that long and very long-distance journeys were less frequent due to logistical difficulties, it is equally true that getting to Tana, Trebizond and even just Constantinople was relatively easy, through maritime transport. It was navigation itself that constituted one of the most fertile areas of Venetian legal and technological innovations during the 13th and 14th centuries.

3. Ships and navigation

If navigation in the Aegean had no secrets for Venetian sailors, entering the Black Sea was more complicated. Since ancient times, the Mediterranean was considered relatively safe, while the Black Sea presented difficult environmental conditions, being a closed basin with peculiar characteristics for winds and currents. The great rivers of Eastern Europe, such as the Don, the Dnieper and the Danube, to name but a few, flow into it, reducing its salinity.

The difference in density and temperature of the water contribute to forming surface currents which in the Black Sea have a direction from north-east to south-west, and therefore contrary to the routes from Constantinople to the Crimean ports. The atmospheric and climatic conditions of the Black Sea make it particularly exposed to the formation of cyclones and since ancient times there have been many shipwrecks caused by strong storms. The climatic differences between the eastern and western parts, separated by the Crimean peninsula, also cause storms that can be very violent. This particular climatic and oceanographic configuration forced sailors to sail along the Anatolian or Romanian coasts, rather than attempting direct crossings between Constantinople and the Crimea. The boats bound for Tana were forced to follow the eastern coast of the Black Sea before arriving in Crimea and then had to win

adverse currents to enter the Sea of Azov through the Kerch Strait. The seasonal regularity of the winds set the pace of the outward and return journeys.

The introduction of the compass in the 13th century, which allowed the calculation of routes without reading the stars, made it possible to navigate even in winter, but maritime traffic decreased significantly from November to February, due to the harsh climate and strong winds. north-east and south-west. Furthermore, entering the Sea of Azov was even more difficult because in the colder months the coastal waters could freeze. These difficulties in navigation, together with more purely mercantile and military aspects, were also overcome thanks to innovations in the shipbuilding sector.

Venetian shipbuilding between the 13th and 14th centuries

In 1224 the Venetian authorities ordered the expropriation of some houses in the area near the arsenal and began work to build new docks. ³⁴ In those same years the demand for timber increased constantly, both for construction and for ships. shipbuilding was the key sector of capacity for innovation, efficiency ³⁵ the city's power, whose success also depended on its and expansion of production. To preserve shipping resources, private individuals were even prohibited from selling boats to anyone who was not a Venetian citizen, apart from old and inefficient ones. ³⁶ The wood for naval construction was purchased directly by the state and came from the Alpine forests of Cadore, the Apennines and the Dalmatian hinterland. ³⁷ Hemp and pitch also became essential —

materials, the demand for which grew steadily during the 13th century. The city authorities imposed equally strict rules on them. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the shipyards were mainly private - only one was owned by the state - but from the second half of the century the state took over the shipping activity, replacing private individuals, who purchased or rented ships built in state shipyards.

In the first half of the fourteenth century, the system of *enchancements* was created, real auctions during which state galleys were awarded to private *patrons*. Between 1310 and 1324 the arsenal was enlarged and modernised. From 1321 the Maggior Consiglio inaugurated a mixed management in which the ships were built in state yards with private capital, and starting from 1333 the state was ³⁸ able to manage naval policy on its own by renting the ships built in the Arsenal to private entrepreneurs. The cost of chartering each ship was proportional to demand, which in turn was based on a calculation of achievable profits in the markets for which the ships were destined. ³⁹ The integration of the public system

with the private one it provided economic advantages for both the state and individual entrepreneurs. Private individuals thus created consortia that took on all the financial costs of building the ships and purchasing the goods, while, starting from 1318, the state guaranteed the supply of public ships and put them up for auction.

The ships

The strength of Venice and Genoa as maritime powers was also measured [at 40](#) based on the quality and number of ships they were able to launch. In general, Venice always remained faithful to the Mediterranean — In tradition and most of the innovations in the naval field were the result of internal needs rather [than](#) external stimuli.

— Throughout the 13th century, ships of different types were mainly small in size, with a reduced tonnage. In large part this was due to the costs of fitting out, but also the range of commercial transport and the fact that there were few ports capable of accommodating large-draft vessels.

Latin ships, both commercial and military, were essentially of two types: galleys and round ships. The merchants mainly sailed on a so-called "round ship" under sail, without oars, equipped with two lateral rudders, up to twenty anchors, two to three masts and equipped with a castle at the bow and one at the stern. During the 13th century the tonnage was increased and in 1268, when he was organizing the crusade, the French king Louis IX turned to the Italian maritime cities for modern and efficient ships "for transmarine passage". Venice offered the sovereign fifteen ships including its largest ship, the Roccaforte, capable of transporting 500 tons of goods.

In the 13th century, the efforts of Venetian shipbuilding concentrated on the galley, which had both oar and sail propulsion. Galleys were agile, fast ships, easy to manoeuvre, and therefore particularly effective in [military](#) uses .

— They could be thin (light) or large (heavy). The thin galleys, sometimes called *fuste*, *galleotte*, or *brigantines*, initially built mainly for war, during the 13th century were adapted to commercial uses, and therefore called *market galleys*, and used above all for the transport of light and space-saving goods , such as precious stones, perfumes and spices.

The ratio of width to length was one to eight. The large galley, equipped with 25-30 benches per side of two or more often three rowers each, made its appearance in Venice from the end of the 13th century, and was preferred for navigation [43](#) in the Black Sea.

— The use of oars was necessary to enter and exit the port and in case of contrary winds, but in the open sea and with a favorable wind the lateen sails mounted, two or more, on each mast were unfurled. The rowers were free men and

salaried workers, experts in both maritime and military art since, in case of need, they had to be ready to take up arms.

For navigation in the Black Sea, a large galley "the size of Romania" (*mensuris Romaniae*) was used, at least since 1303, with a capacity of around 80 tons.

— The large galley modified in this way was a Venetian invention, the pride of its seafaring art and shipbuilding technology, and combined the maneuvering advantages offered by the galley with the power and capacity of round ships. Throughout the 14th century attempts were made to increase their speed, often with crews ranging from a. Over the years the increasing the rowers on each bank, 46 minimum of 60 to a 45 tonnage of the România-Black Sea galleys men. maximum of 250 — increased until it reached 140 tons in the hold. According to an anonymous chronicle from the 14th century, the state sent large galleys to Romania for the first time in 1290.

47

An important innovation for Black Sea navigation in the 14th century was the *nock*, which replaced the *ship* (or round ship) for westward voyages. The name *cocca* most likely derives from the ships used in Baltic trade, the *kogge*, as early as the 12th century. 48 The nock was hailed as a true revolution in Mediterranean navigation. 49 The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani also states that in 1303 the Genoese, Venetians and Catalans began to sail with nocks as they were safer and cheaper «and there was a great change in shipping in this sea of ours». 50 The cork was better suited to the needs of voyages which might encounter difficult sailing conditions and was therefore regularly used as a cargo vessel for the Black Sea, although the large galley remained the most popular means of transport for trade with the Levant.

Nonetheless, the first mention of a nock in Venice occurs in 1310.

51

The nocks had a large tonnage (from 300 to over 500 tons), were equipped with a single rudder located in the center of the stern, and had from one to three decks. They were usually equipped with a single mast with a square sail, but some nocks had three to four masts and two to three castles up to seven high 52 The very shape of the nock allowed it to turn according to the wind and meters. cope with the weather better than galleys and round ships, for this reason a crew of thirty or forty people was sufficient. The nocks were used for were long-distance voyages, making them reliable and 53 However, being slow to maneuver and with few sailors on board, they difficult to defend and easy prey for pirates. For this reason, large galleys continued to be preferred as they combined the advantages of round ships with those of galleys.

economically convenient.

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Alongside the ships intended for long-distance voyages there were others

types of boats active in the Black Sea. The most widespread of these was the *tauride* or *tarreta*, a ship equipped with a single deck, a mast or two with a lateen sail and two lateral rudders. It was a mixed sailing and rowing vessel and could transport up to 200 tons of goods, but was mainly used for the transport of people.

⁵⁴ Throughout the time of the Crusades, for example, the *Taurides* had been used to transport pilgrims. In Tana, in the mid-fourteenth century, several merchants owned at least one.

The rhythm of travel in the Black Sea: the *mude*

In Venice the state controlled, together with the shipbuilding industry, also the rules relating to navigation and the organization of commercial convoys, often escorted by armed galleys.

⁵⁵ In Venice the term *muda* indicated both the convoy of ships (which never traveled alone, but always in convoy) and the periodicity of the journeys, or the period during which the authorities allowed ⁵⁶ Only the most precious, small and light goods regulations of the (*havere subtle*) – navigation. spices, jewels and silks - fell within the *mude* and were therefore subjected to rigid public control, while heavy goods - timber, salt, wheat, oil, wine, etc. – although under state control themselves, they were excluded from the calendar prepared by the state.

⁵⁷

The România-Black Sea naval line was inaugurated by Venice at the beginning of the 14th century. ⁵⁸ The Venetian ships passed the Bosphorus even before, but they were not scheduled voyages organized in a systematic way with the control of the municipality, in fact they «were not galleys from Romania but galleys that went to Romania». ⁵⁹ From 1301 the line towards the Black Sea became regular and organized down to the smallest detail, even if the ports of call increased over time, making navigation less complicated and providing the crews with more points of support and greater safety. In the years in which Venice managed to have secure control over the routes in the Levant, the convoys stopped at Ragusa, Durazzo, Corfu, Chiarenza (Dyma in Morea), Corone, Modone, Crete and Negroponte, before reaching Constantinople, where they stopped for a few days.

They then crossed the straits to the Anatolian coast to Trabzon, and then continued north to Tana. From 1330 the convoys arriving in Constantinople were divided into two groups: one stopped in Trebizond and the other continued on to the Crimea and Tana. The two *mude* then met in the Byzantine capital to return to Venice together. Between 1320 and 1350 Venice organized thirty voyages to the Black Sea. Twelve times the convoy separated in Constantinople into two groups of ships headed separately for Trebizond and Tana. Thirteen times the ships went only to Trebizond, and five times only to

⁶⁰ Tana.

Unlike other mercantile routes, in which private initiative played a primary role, the Black Sea voyages remained under the strict control of the municipality through an extraordinary commission of five "wise men" (*extraordinarii*) appointed by the senate starting from 1321 and until 1329, responsible for collecting the freight paid by the patrons of the galleys. This system allowed the state to directly control Levante's commercial activity, but was particularly costly to the treasury. It was therefore thought to privatize travel, at least in part. As we have seen above, the state introduced the *enchantment* system precisely to encourage private initiative in long-distance navigation, without however completely disengaging itself. There were many cases, especially during periods of international political crisis and therefore of greater danger, in which the municipality directly committed itself to arming the Black Sea galleys.

In general, state-armed galleys that went to the Black Sea left once or twice a year. From the documents it appears that two trips were organized in 1324, 1330 and 1339, but it is probable that the double annual *mude* was more frequent.

⁶¹ As a rule they left in July. On the basis of the regularity of the *mude* we could divide the Romania-Black Sea voyages into three historical intervals. From 1301 to 1350 the convoys left between June and July and included from two to ten galleys, of which a maximum of four reached Tana, where they remained for five to eight days. After a four-year break due to the conflict with Genoa - from 1351 to 1354 - the journeys resumed in 1355 with the departure moved forward by a month. The ships left from 15 July to 15 August and remained in Tana for a period ranging from eight to fourteen days. Another interruption in travel occurred during the War of Chioggia, from 1377 to 1381. Navigation resumed in 1382 with methods similar to those of the previous period, and therefore with departure from 18-20 July until 15 August and an average of two galleys arriving as far as Tana where a minimum of eight to a maximum of fourteen stopped. days. ⁶² However, from 1382 the Venetian galleys stopped at Tana only once, in 1393.

4. *Legal and associative instruments*

Statutes and agreements

Productive and commercial activities, including navigation, were regulated by Venice from ordinary and extraordinary writings which, as in the rest of Italy

municipal, are called statutes.

⁶³ The first Venetian statutes were drawn up between the end of the 12th century and the early years of the 13th. The statutes codified customary law, creating an increasingly complex legal structure. Trade occupies a substantial part of the first systematic statutory drafting carried out during the reign of Enrico Dandolo (1192-1205), thirteen chapters out of seventy-four, which deal with various topics, from the typology of contracts to the legislation relating to ships. Constantly evolving, the statutes were integrated every time a case arose that was not included in the existing rules. This led to the great legal project of Doge Iacopo Tiepolo, who in 1242 organized Venetian law in a code in five books which, with numerous subsequent additions, constituted the regulatory basis until the eighteenth century. One of the most interesting additions to Tiepolo's code is the *liber sextus* of 1346, or the collection of rules relating to maritime law accumulated over the years.

⁶⁴

Although detailed, and constantly revised and expanded, written legislation was not always sufficient to regulate all aspects that governed the functioning of a complex administrative machine such as that of Venice between the 13th and 15th centuries. When the written rules did not cover a certain subject, usage, or customary law, intervened, the primary source of normative production in the medieval West. The statutes of the sea did not deal so much with the regulatory complex that regulated maritime activity, such as transport or trade, but rather with the technical aspects, such as tonnage or ⁶⁵ Trade with the East, however, fell within the dimensions of the ships. rules relating to ships *extra cultum*, i.e. those that sailed the seas outside the Adriatic, further from the of the Black Sea, the body of homeland. In the years of the Venetian settlement on the coasts written laws was already sufficient to regulate the majority of cases. However, if an event occurred that was not contemplated by the legislation and that *custom* was not able to resolve, *arbitrium was resorted to*. In disuse at the beginning of the 14th century, this practice often ended up before the Maggior Consiglio, whose judgment had the force of law.

The identification of the merchant class with the city nobility prevented Venice from developing a merchant guild comparable to that of other Italian mercantile cities. In the seaside cities, and in Venice in particular, the merchants identified themselves with the Municipality and controlled commercial activity through it; in fact they dictated domestic as well as foreign policy. This does not mean that those intermediate legal subjects, between the citizen and the public authority, characteristic of political systems were absent.

medieval and themselves the source of law as "producers" of *customs*.⁶⁶ Families, schools, brotherhoods and craft guilds, to name a few, were basic associative bodies fundamental to the functioning of medieval Venetian society.⁶⁷

The installation of the emporiums on the Black Sea and the penetration into the territory of the Mongol empire represented a further enlargement of the Venetian commercial, and therefore legal, space, which required state intervention to regulate its activities. To this end, the Venetian authorities strove to develop rules also recognized by the sovereigns of the places in which they operated, to guarantee their interests and aimed at avoiding accidents and tensions. The agreements stipulated with the Mongols were, with some exceptions, *pacta*, or the most binding of the legal documents, which Venice had issued since the early Middle Ages. An essential condition for the *pactum* to be effective was reciprocity, or mutual recognition of the clauses contracted and transcribed in the document. Among the characteristics of Venetian diplomacy were the detailed instructions given to ambassadors, to cover any eventuality during negotiations. Delegations sent to the khans of the Golden Horde or the Ilkhanate were no exception to this rule. The ambassadors often managed to obtain what they asked for, but the *pactum* was always the result of a long and tiring negotiation, made more complex by communication difficulties and cultural distance. Despite the diplomatic skill of the Venetians, it was the openness of the Mongols, and their interest in maintaining commercial relations that ensured that common ground was found, always constituted by the convergence of economic interests.

On the part of the Mongols, who did not compromise on their prerogatives as sovereigns, the *pactas* were always presented as imperial concessions, or as edicts of the khan. The *pacta* also defined the methods of settlement and operation of the Venetians in Mongolian territory. For example, they fixed the size of the land and the construction methods of their neighborhood, which included warehouses, houses, roads, and other structures and buildings both for representation and for daily use such as baths, ovens, and mills. The legal rules to be observed in Mongolian territory and the functions of the consul, who represented the Republic, were also established. In practice, both the relationships between the judicial power of the Venetian official and that of the local authorities were defined, as well as the spheres of influence of both in the event of disputes or crimes. Furthermore, the *pacta* also defined the tax regime to which people operating in Mongolian territory and the goods exchanged were subjected, including taxes, deductions and exemptions. Finally, the agreements protected the validity of the will drawn up by the Venetian citizen in

Mongolian territory. The high risk of death abroad and the size of the assets required state interventions to protect the heirs, who were often investors themselves. It was therefore necessary for the regime to which the goods entrusted to the merchant who died during his stay in Asia were to be clearly regulated.

Although the *pactum* was a very specific and detailed writing, the application of the agreements was not guaranteed in practice, and tensions both between the Venetian and Genoese communities, and between the Latins and the Mongol sovereigns, continued to disturb life and safety of residents in Tana and other locations, making almost continuous diplomatic interventions necessary. In practice, the combination of mature legal systems and expert diplomacy greatly supported the creation of areas in which Venetian merchants could operate, but the existing structures were not able to supply the needs of international law, if we can call it that, universally recognized. These were therefore implicitly fragile agreements, which offered limited guarantees and which proved inadequate on more than one occasion. But the reasons for their fragility are to be attributed more to the endemic conflict between the Venetians and the Genoese or to violations by Latin citizens, as we have seen, than to transgressions or failures on the part of the Mongolian authorities, which were also present.

From *commendation* to *company*

The two most widespread types of contract in Venice from the second half of the 13th century were the commenda and the company. The commenda contract, or *collegianza* (in Venice the term *rogadia* was also used), was the most widespread economic-financial form of association for maritime trade. It reduced the risks associated with sea travel, and for this reason it was well applied to the activities of merchants. The form of commendation that was most successful in Venice was the so-called unilateral one. In it there was a stable partner (*stans*) who did not leave the city, and therefore did not take on any personal risk, but invested the entire capital intended for the commercial enterprise, which could be either liquid money or, more often, goods. The itinerant partner (*procertans*) who embarked on ships and went to Tana or Tabriz, took on the material commitment of the enterprise, personal risks included. Three quarters of the profits went to the permanent member and one quarter to the traveling member. There was also a type of so-called bilateral commenda, less widespread than the previous one, with which the *stans* partner put in only three quarters of the capital, and the profits were divided in half.

The commenda was an immediate success for at least two reasons: on the one hand

On the other hand it allowed the creation of companies in which large amounts of capital were invested, which promised the possibility of equally high profits. On the other hand, it gave the opportunity to participate in commercial activity to those individuals who, excluded from the city patriciate and the mercantile profession, would otherwise have had neither the resources nor the skills to set up an investment company.

Thanks to the commenda contract and the increased reach of merchants in the second half of the 13th century, the entire Venetian society had the possibility of financing commercial activities, and to a large extent it did. The savings of families, whether few or many, fueled the turnover of the Venetian merchant class engaged in the East. For this mechanism to work it was necessary to rely on people who had the knowledge and authority to draw up documents with legal value, and this is why we find notaries in the port intent on stipulating commendation contracts for anyone who wanted to invest their capital in the trading of overseas.

In Tana and in the Mongol Empire, contracts of commendation were rather rare as company was preferred to them, for reasons that we will explain later. However, we find some cases involving commodity transactions that are very common on eastern markets. ⁶⁸ The analysis of commendation contracts shows how the capital employed by individual investors was often modest, but this type of agreement was not exclusive. The commendatory merchant raised the capital, stipulating several contracts before leaving. It was a collective financing system similar in concept to modern joint-stock companies, which guaranteed access to investments even to those classes who would otherwise have been excluded. ⁶⁹ With the change in mercantile professionalism that we described at the beginning of the chapter, the forms of association and the ways in which capital —

was invested also changed. The commenda proved to be a tool that was in some ways inadequate for long-term trade both because it imposed on the traveling member a form of isolation which in distant lands presented too many unknowns, and because it did not guarantee the permanent member the certainty of profit.

It was not uncommon, among other things, for the socio *procertans* to misappropriate part of the earnings. ⁷⁰ From the early years of the 13th century the *company* had joined the *commenda* and gradually took over. Born as an essentially family association as early as the 12th century, the company was a business company that transformed during the 14th century to become an increasingly complex instrument, which absorbed increasingly large amounts of capital and involved not only the members of a family, but also strangers. Before the fourteenth century the company encountered much resistance in the maritime cities because

exposed its members to high risks by virtue of the very nature of sea voyages, and especially long-distance ones. On the other hand, this model of society steadily grew for land travel, which presented less risk.

When the companies opened up to members outside the family, and therefore to external capital, they gradually became not only commercial but also financial ⁷¹ instruments - they managed loans, exchanges, movement of capital abroad - and industrial, directly linked to the aspects productive. Nonetheless, family ties remained a central characteristic of the company, as demonstrated by the contracts stipulated in Tana in the second half of where most of the agreements concerned commercial and Trecento activities, ⁷³ The case of companies set up by Venetians with administration was not uncommon.

⁷²

local merchants. ⁷⁴ Sometimes the company expired before all the goods were sold, in which case external professionals, often merchants themselves, were used to monetize what was left in the warehouses. For example, the merchant Giovanni Testa, active in Tana in 1361, owned a consignment of lacquer worth 50 ducats which he had failed to sell by the expiry of the company he had with Pietro Venier and which he therefore entrusted to Michele Lizzi, a Florentine merchant, so that he could sell it, as had happened to him with a batch of rabbit skins which, remaining unsold, he had entrusted to the merchant Giovanni da ⁷⁵ Verona.

If it is true that the commenda was preferable for maritime travel, it is equally true that the company was the associative instrument most used by the Venetians in the Golden Horde during the 14th century. ⁷⁶ It is with company contracts that the first lasting commercial agreements occur between local merchants and producers or between Venetian merchants and Central Asian, Arab, Armenian and Jewish merchants. The case of two Venetians, Marino del Rosso and Bartolomeo Bembo, is particularly interesting, who in September 1360 decided to open a tavern in the Armenian neighborhood of Tana (*contrata arminorum*). Marino set up the fund, Bartolomeo paid for the household goods arriving on the galleys scheduled in the following weeks, with the agreement to divide costs and profits equally. ⁷⁷ A few days later the Muslim merchant (*saracenus*) Coza Azillyas rented land with a cellar (*fovea*) to the Venetian Niccolò Corner to open a supply business. Even in this case the two shared costs and profits.

⁷⁸ These examples illustrate how, in the company, the partners shared profits and losses based on the invested capital and everyone was supportive in their commitment to third parties. The duration was also indicated in the deed of incorporation, and upon dissolution the members were liquidated in a single account. It was thanks to these tools, increasingly widespread, accessible and complex, that the Venetian merchants

they found the resources and means to expand their activities even into areas that had been completely unexplored until then.

1. Kedar, *Merchants in Crisis*, pp. 47-48.

2. Romano, *Patricians and Popolani*, p. 29; Hocquet, *The mechanisms of trafficking*, p. 534.

3. Caravale, *The institutions of the Republic*, p. 305.

4. Flavors, *The goods of international trade*, pp. 5-6pm.

5. Hocquet, *The mechanisms of trafficking*, p. 530.

6. From about the mid-12th century the markets of Central Asia and India had been attracted to Western demand. The goods from the Far East arrived on the Red Sea, in Adjab and continued by land towards the Nile delta, from here to Alexandria and Damietta. Also for this reason, in the first half of the 13th century, in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, Venice did not invest resources to cross the straits and settle on the Black Sea.

7. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 22.

8. Tognetti, *The mercantile companies*, pp. 705-706; Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, pp. 288-355.

9. Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, ed. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, p. 2.

10. The bibliography on this is very extensive. See Lopez, *Studies on the Genoese economy*; Lopez, *New lights on Italians*, pp. 83-145; Allsen, *Commodities and Exchange*.

11. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 29.

12. Ibid., pp. 28-29 and commentary pp. 389-391; Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 73.

13. It is a trading manual written by an unknown author, almost certainly a Florentine, a few years before Pegolotti's *Pratica*. The manuscript was found in the Marucelliana Library in Florence by H. Bautier who, although not giving it a title, identified it with a definition present in the first lines of the manuscript itself: *Nottario depiù chose*. The French historian published extracts from the document in the proceedings of the international conference on medieval trade held in Beirut in 1966 (Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, pp. 263-332).

14. *Tarifa*, ed. Orlandini, pp. 4-6.

15. Bourbon, *History of Mar Yahballaha*.

16. Odorico da Pordenone, *Relatio de mirabilis*.

17. Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, pp. 282-283. The anonymous author of *Nottario* provides the list of the goods that could be found in Trebizond that arrived by land with caravans from Tabriz.

18. Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, pp. 119 and 122 and p. 119, note 12.

19. Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 284.

20. Odorico da Pordenone, *Relatio de mirabilis*.

21. Lopez, *New lights on Italians*, p. 50.

22. Paviot, *Les marchands italiens*, p. 83.

23. Lopez, *New lights on Italians*, pp. 92-93; also Skrzinskaja, *History of the Burrow*, p. 33. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 21; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 286.

24. In 1360 the Venetian merchant Giovanni Barozzi had entrusted the Saracen banker Coza Azi Aza with a large quantity of goods, including silk and precious stones, for a total value of 50 sums to be sold in Saraj. On September 24, the two went before the notary in Tana to stipulate a compensation agreement as Coza claimed to have been robbed of all the goods during the trip. ASV, CI, Notaries, reg. 1, fasci. 7, envelope 19, reg. 1, f. 40r.

25. Pegolotti's *Saracanco* is a complicated toponym, but it is almost certainly today's Saray-Jük, a city on the Ural river. See Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 296.

26. Already Kanchow: Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, pp. 21st and 23rd.

27. Pegolotti's *Cassai* (Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 21) cannot be Marco Polo's *Quinsai*, metropolis of Song China. Moule, *Marco Polo's Description*, pp. 105-128, because *Quinsai* corresponds to today's Hangzhou, a city located near the eastern coast of China and therefore very far from the route described by Pegolotti. It is probable that Pegolotti's *Cassai* is a corrupted form of *Cattai/Catai*,

that is, the Yuan khanate in general, which was accessed via Kanchow/Zhangye.

[28.](#) Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, ed. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, 95, pp. 126-128; Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*, p. 106.

[29.](#) Lopez, *From Venice to Delhi in the fourteenth century*.

[30.](#) Lopez, *Venice and the broad lines of commercial expansion*, pp. 53-59.

[31.](#) Lopez, *New lights on Italians*, p. 58; Hocquet, *The mechanisms of trafficking*, pp. 538-539.

[32.](#) Lopez, *New lights on Italians*, pp. 60-61.

[33.](#) Berindei, Veinstein, *La Tana-Azaq*, p. 116.

[34.](#) Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 43; Luzzatto, *Economic history of Venice*, p. 41.

[35.](#) *Ibid.*

[36.](#) Lane, *Venice. At Maritime Republic*, p. 45.

[37.](#) Dorigo, *The expressions of art*, p. 849.

[38.](#) Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, pp. 105-106.

[39.](#) Concina, *The Arsenal of Venice*, p. 26; Dumerc, *Maritime maritime armaments*, pp. 626-627.

[40.](#) Melis, *Transport and communications in the Middle Ages*, p. 7.

[41.](#) Tucci, *The maritime enterprise*, pp. 627-660.

[42.](#) Karpov, *Venetian navigation*, p. 22; Lane, *Navires et constructeurs*, p. 14. Tucci, *La Venetian navigation in the thirteenth century*.

[43.](#) Lane, *Venetian Ships*, p. 9.

[44.](#) According to an anonymous chronicle from the 14th century, the state sent large galleys to Romania for the first time in 1290, but this is probably an anachronism. Lane, *Sailors and the nautical revolution*, p. 158; Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 105.

[45.](#) Lane, *Venetian Ships*, p. 32.

[46.](#) Karpov, *Drevnejšie postanovlenija senata*, p. 26; Lane, *Venetian Maritime Law*, p. 30.

[47.](#) Lane, *The Ships of Venice*, p. 158; Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 105.

[48.](#) Unger, *The Ships in the Medieval Economy*, pp. 178-180.

[49.](#) Lane, *Venetian Ships*, p. 38.

[50.](#) Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, IX-LXXVII, pp. 148-149; Hocquet, *La sel et la fortune de Venise*, vol. II, p. 104.

[51.](#) Tucci, *The maritime enterprise*, pp. 646-647.

[52.](#) Hocquet, *La sel et la fortune de Venise*, vol. II, p. 108; Karpov, *Drevnejšie postanovlenija senata*, p. 28.

[53.](#) Lane, *Venetian Ships*, p. 38. On 15 August 1360 in Tana, Ser Barnaba Gerardo was the patron saint of a nock docked in the port: ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 33v.

[54.](#) Tucci, *The maritime enterprise*, pp. 637-638.

[55.](#) Luzzatto, *Economic history of Venice*, p. 42.

[56.](#) Hocquet, *The mechanisms of trafficking*, pp. 587-588. In the 14th century the term appears in some documents with a military significance (Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 27).

[57.](#) Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, pp. 25-26.

[58.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[59.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[60.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 108, n. 56.

[61.](#) The authorities tried to organize voyages in spring and autumn, but the project did not work because the departure in March prevented the galleys from returning to Venice before the Flanders galleys, with which they were synchronized, left. Departure in September did not allow the galleys to return before winter. In any case, the usual rhythm of navigation was modified during the conflicts with Genoa. Karpov, *The Venetian Navigation of the Black Sea*, p. 64. See also Dini, *The merchants' travels*, pp. 195-225; Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, pp. 26-27.

[62.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[63.](#) For an overview of the legal system protecting Venetian merchants, see Pansolli, *The hierarchy of sources*.

[64.](#) Crescenzi, *Civil law*, pp. 409-410.

65. Rösch, *The Big Gain*, pp. 240-241. 66. It is a very complex topic that fully affects the history of medieval law. The fact that in the thirteenth-fourteenth century cities of northern Italy (and not only) customary law, originating from the needs of the subjects who produced it, was dominant compared to the law of "hierarchical" emanation, does not exclude that it was also important in Venice, where the "myth" of the centralized state and already in possession of many of the requirements of the modern state has undergone a process of revision by the most recent historiography.

For an overview of the debate see Caravale, *The institutions of the Republic*, p. 304.

67. Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant*, pp. 259-265; Caravale, *The institutions of the Republic*, pp. 303-304.

68. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, file. 7, reg. 1, f. 7r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 48, p. 32.

69. In Venice, much more than elsewhere, the commendation contract favored the birth of new wealth, of what in communal Italy were defined as *homini novi*, but long-distance travel, such as that to China, remained the prerogative of the aristocracy, the only class capable of providing the huge capital necessary for that enterprise. Kedar, *Merchants in Crisis*, pp. 71-73.

70. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

71. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 9r-11v.

72. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, file. 1, f. 36r; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 117, file. Marco Marzella, b. 2, f. 1v.

73. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 11v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 76, pp. 38-39; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 17r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 102, p. 46.

74. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, 9r; 10r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 62, p. 35; n. 70, p. 37.

75. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 3, f. 9r-11v. Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 278, pp. 96-98.

76. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 4, f. 15r, 21r; envelope 117, notary Marco Marzella, file. 2, f. 1r, 1v; envelope 181, fasc. 5, f. 67r; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 1r, 1v, 14v.

77. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 1, fasci. 7, f. 36r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 216, p. 77.

78. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 1, fasci. 7, f. 36bis; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 222, p. 79.

10. The means of exchange

1. *Preliminary considerations*

A large-scale interconnected trading system needed universally recognized and accepted instruments of exchange, but the lack of a "free" currency or at least of standards accepted in multiple trading circuits that guaranteed convertibility between separate monetary systems proved to be an enormous obstacle for the administrative and military functioning of the Mongol Empire, which relied primarily on trade revenue to maintain its solvency. This obstacle was only partially overcome, thanks to the introduction of new monetary regimes in the various khanates, which aimed to facilitate international transactions. The Mongols, from this point of view, were innovators - think of the spread of paper money in China, as we saw in the eighth chapter - but the creation of a single monetary system which on the one hand unified their empire and on the other established internationally recognized standards was not achieved.

In Europe, until the great commercial expansion of the 12th and 13th centuries, the economy was characterized by a prevalence of virtual currencies, of account, and by a very limited circulation of physical money. At the basis of this monetary scarcity there were multiple factors, including the difficulties in procuring metals for minting, their high costs, the spread of alternative means of payment (goods in kind), and the currency policy of Roman Europe -Germanic. From the 11th century onwards, the growth of the continental economy produced an increase in the demand for money throughout Europe in the face of a perpetually scarce supply.

1

Even though Venice was a polyglot and multicultural city, accessing the markets of the most remote Asia and dealing with populations who, until the creation of the Mongol empire, had been excluded from trade with Europe, created

communication difficulties for the merchants and for the administration of the Venetian communities on the Black Sea. The demand for translators and interpreters multiplied, creating spaces for new professions and demand for communication specialists who could manage both oral interpreting and written documentation occurred between the various chancelleries. For example, it is evident from the linguistic structure of the various treaties between the Golden Horde and Venice, which have come down to us in Latin and more rarely in the vernacular, that they were originally written in Mongolian and subsequently translated.

Finally we find another fundamental aspect of the exchange, which is the equivalence between weights and measures of different systems. If even today an individual who attempted to mentally convert between the metric system and the British imperial system would encounter serious difficulties, imagine a commercial world in which the systems compared were innumerable, not only in Italy, but in the Mediterranean basin, in the Levant, in the Mongol Empire, and in Chinese and Indian Asia. Here too, Italian trade had to adapt, partly by exporting its own measures, the equivalences of which were already widely used (for example between the Venetian pound and the Genoese pound), and partly by adopting new measures, which were in force in the places of settlement. In this case it was the flexibility and specialization of the merchant that guided a process of gradual conciliation and compatibility between the different metrological systems. In this, *trading practices* were essential, real manuals for the merchant's use and consumption. In particular, Pegolotti's manual, which has survived to us practically intact, shows the essential role of the merchant's specialized knowledge in the conduct of "merchant" abroad. In this context, the role of the Mongol empire as a promoter of compatible and comparable systems is less noticeable, and it is therefore a less regulated context than the financial one, as one might expect from a political class interested more in revenue and the circulation of money than to the technical aspects of mercantile art.

2. *The Mongols and money*

Different administrative systems and political divisions made it impossible to create a unified monetary system among the various regional economies, but the general trend since the time of Möngke Khan (r. 1251-1259) was to standardize and unify the various forms of exchange and tax collection, balancing the need for centralized revenue with existing structures in conquered territories. A first organic tax reform project was implemented in 1238 by Ögödei, but it was above all during the Möngke khanate that they were

introduced more coherent rules, including a census in all regions of the empire, and the introduction of stable forms of taxation, which replaced arbitrary levies and special taxes. If these reforms tended to give the empire a centralized administrative form, they did not however succeed in substantially modifying the monetary regimes in use in the individual khanates, where the coins produced by local mints and in use in the neighboring regions continued to circulate. In summary, we can say that Mongolian taxation was divided into four types of exactions. The *qubchur* was a sort of tithe applied to the nomads' livestock, from which only the descendants of Chinggis Khan and other members of the aristocracy were excluded. A second type of tax was a kind of tribute paid by the conquered populations, and consisted of products of the local economy, money and valuables, or services and corvée. A third type of levy was the tax on productive activities, which generally followed the practices used in conquered countries. Religious bodies and some social categories were excluded from taxation. However, by far the most profitable tax for the Mongols was that on trade, the *tamgha*, linked to the movement of goods and people. Pegolotti often mentions this gabelle with different names (*tamunga*, *tamenga*, *camunoca*) and describes its application in relation to the goods exchanged.

As regards the circulation of money, the Mongol empire was essentially based on two elements common to all khanates. The first, as we have noted several times, is the central role of trade revenues in the tax system. The collection of taxes and gabelles based on the sale or transportation of goods itself required greater circulation of money, and therefore stimulated the production of monetary instruments that could function in different modes of trade, both local and within each khanate, both, above all, between the various khanates, and between these and foreign countries. The systems in use before the empire, which relied mainly on silk or uncoined metals for higher value transactions, were not sufficient to satisfy a growing volume of trade.

The second characteristic is the openness to foreign merchants, which was encouraged in each khanate, and which therefore fueled the growth of exchanges between commercial circuits in which different forms of coinage prevailed. The increase in turnover between these circuits favored a true phenomenon of globalization in an international commercial network that connected China, India, Central Asia, Europe and the Middle East. While within each khanate the Mongols could continue to rely on pre-existing systems of exchange (such as barter or local currencies), stitching together these regional systems and placing them in an international dimension was a vital objective for the

survival of the empire itself. The financial and fiscal interventions necessary to support these developments are at the basis of the innovations in monetary matters and the solutions that Mongolian rulers and foreign merchants found, albeit amidst enormous difficulties. Mongol domination was, from the point of view of money, a period of constant experimentation, and it was the Mongols who led the process of internationalization of trade. This was largely due to the constant need for liquidity on the part of the states they had created and which came mainly from the massive infusions of money generated by trade.

The very attempt to create international commercial structures, not only in legal terms and political openness, but also and above all in practical terms that facilitated the convertibility of money and therefore allowed its circulation between very different areas, made the Mongol empire the precursor of the international monetary system that the European powers managed to establish only from the 16th century onwards, first with the silver system of the Spanish (*silver standard*) and then with the international gold system adopted in the 19th century (*gold standard*).

The initiatives of the Mongols were accompanied, in Europe, by a period equally rich in innovations, generated by what has been defined as the "commercial revolution" of the late Middle Ages, whose main effect was to introduce principles of flexibility and multiplicity in the use of money. liquid which favored the convertibility of currencies. In Europe and the Middle East in the 13th century the currency was made up of the precious metal, gold and silver, which were suitable for international trade. In Central and Eastern Asia, silver was mainly used, while in India there was more demand for gold. Both metals were known, monetized (in part) and used for high-value transactions, but the equivalences between them were very difficult to establish. The coins had various weights and denominations whose intrinsic value changed depending on the level of quality, purity, which varied according to the issues and the mints in which they were minted, and wear. The relationship between the two metals also changed from market to market, with side effects that tended to make one metal flow towards one market rather than another, destabilizing the circulation of money.

In China, the Mongolian government solved the problems inherent in the creation of a single standard, both for the internal market and for foreign trade, by issuing countervalues for silver and gold in paper money. As we have seen, the foreign merchant turned to government offices that functioned as exchange agencies to transform his own currency into the currency used in the Yuan empire.

² At the end of the business, when the merchant returned, what was left was converted back into metallic currency. Since the value of the

paper money was based on silver, foreign merchants received the precious metal in ingots, or by weight.

Since silver was accepted throughout the Mongol Empire, and also in Europe and Egypt, it was this ingot or bar that became, in fact, the monetary instrument of international trade. Both in Central Asia and in Iran the coinage was linked to the silver system, in turn based on ingots ³ which from the end of the 13th century became increasingly widespread as called *balish*, ⁴ From 1259 in China there was also a

—
means of payment also in Turkestan. silver coin —
called *dachao tongbao*, but from the 1370s, when Ahmad Fanakati (d. 1282) was minister of finance, the state tried to hoard the influx of silver by creating reserves and directly guaranteeing the solvency of the banknotes. ⁵ According to the most recent studies, one of the bases of the affirmation of the silver bar was constituted by the —

remittances of the appanages of the Mongolian aristocracy, located in the various khanates and mainly in China, which required an instrument of transfer of funds accepted everywhere. The proceeds of the economic activities of these appanages, which functioned as companies, required quantifiable monetary units to be quantified and transferred, and therefore the silver bar prevailed.

6

The attempt to introduce paper money in Ilkhanid Persia at the end of the 13th century failed, but nevertheless indicates the Mongol desire to establish a single means of conversion of metallic currencies and a single form of payment universally accepted within the empire. It is reasonable to assume that, if the monetary systems of Iran and China, which were the main Asian economic powers, had been unified, the Golden Horde and *the Chagadaide ulus* would also have been pushed to launch similar reforms, in a real and own monetary revolution which would have anticipated the modern currency system by many centuries.

Called *somo* in Central Asia, and *sommo* in Venice, the silver bar weighed just over two hundred grams of fine, and became a universal means of payment in two forms: as an ingot by weight or made into local coinage. Venetian merchants obtained the sums not as an issue of the Venetian state, but from private laboratories that produced them by melting objects or coins, and certified their weight and quality. The merchant took these sums to Tana or Tabriz, and there he could convert them into local currencies, particularly sours, with a seigniorage of around 6%. In the early years of the 14th century, from 202 aspers obtained from a sum, the Tana mint retained 12, and the merchant was left with 190. A similar operation, albeit with slightly different costs depending on the mint, could be repeated in any city of the empire,

regardless of the type of local currency. Precisely in the 13th century the exploitation of new silver mines in Bohemia created a surplus in Europe, and in particular in Venice, which could also obtain supplies from the mines of Tyrol. This not only favored the production and circulation of large quantities (see paragraph 3 below), but created the material conditions for entering the silver system of the international market created by the Mongols.

For Venetian merchants, liquid money, various merchandise - in particular cloth - and high-value objects were the most widespread and commonly accepted means of exchange on the markets of the Golden Horde and more generally in international trade. Aside from the silver sums, we must therefore consider three other typologies: the merchandise itself, precious items (such as stones and pearls), and gold coinage. Goods could be exchanged through forms of barter with local products. Let us imagine that there was a mercantile culture capable of establishing equivalences, for example between barrels of wine (exported to the Golden Horde) and barrels of caviar (imported to Europe) that could be concluded without a direct exchange of money, but by resorting to currencies of account, or simply to bargaining. The valuables, however, were not easily monetizable, and although they could be used for some high-value transactions, we suspect that their actual use was something else. The Mongolian commercial culture, although open to foreign merchants, was not without constraints, and access to the markets, to the caravanserais, to the protection offered by the Mongolian soldiers, and more generally to free passage, also depended on the relationships that the merchants they established with the local rulers and with the khan himself.

The precious items, therefore, were above all a tribute or a gift required to "do business" with the Mongols, and obtain the protection that only the local power could guarantee. Homage to the local lord was essential to obtain access and privileges, and in some cases it could even result in a very profitable exchange, if the lord decided to reciprocate the tribute with a gift of greater value.

On the other hand, the Venetians were accustomed to this system in which the doors opened to trade only after satisfying the political authorities, and in their dealings with Trebizond, for example, they managed to keep trade tariffs low only thanks to huge donations to 'emperor. In reality, foreign merchants, although their activity could be guaranteed by treaties and concessions negotiated at diplomatic level, remained extremely vulnerable, and bringing valuables was necessary as insurance to ingratiate themselves with the Mongolian aristocrats, protect their investments and obtain benefits based on the unpredictable contingencies of staying in distant lands. From the point of view of the Mongolian authorities, on the other hand, although foreigners enjoyed extensive privileges, they were nevertheless subjected to their authority and often

they had to enter their service.

If sums, merchandise and precious items were the three forms of exchange at the basis of international trade between the Venetians and the Mongols, a different discussion must be made for gold. This had an enormous diffusion in the European coinage of the 13th century, culminating, in Venice, with the issue of the ducat in 1284. European gold coins, but above all the florin and the ducat, soon established themselves as a means of exchange in international transactions in the Mediterranean area and northern Europe. Although the Byzantine gold coinage had a long history, the *perperis* were no longer very reliable, having been subjected to constant devaluations, and they did not find acceptance in international trade beyond that within the Levantine and Pontic area.

A gold coin had been minted in the Ilkhanate, but this does not appear to have entered circulation, nor does it appear to have had real "legal tender" in the sense that these were sporadic issues based on the same dies (and therefore of the same weight) of silver dirhams. Pegolotti tells us that in Tabriz the merchant could transform the gold he had with him into coins which he called *casinini* (or *cassinini*), probably referring to a coin minted by Ghazan. This was made of fine gold (23 1/8 carats) and minted at the local mint in exchange for a seigniorage fee. The *cassinino* could be used in Tabriz, and had a value of 28 or 29 aspers of Tabriz silver. From Pegolotti's explanation of the value of silver coins it is clear that silver was more widespread than gold. The *cassinino* was probably the gold dinar of which several issues were made by the Ilkhanid emperors, whose value corresponded to ten times that of the silver dinar. In Persia the ratio of gold to silver was generally around 1:10 (or even less) and remained relatively unchanged throughout the entire Mongol period, as we know from Ibn Battuta's notes. In Venice, from 1285 until 1349, the ratio between gold and silver favored gold, which, in 1328, cost up to 24 Grossi, with a ratio of 1:14.2. Bringing silver to Asia and exchanging it for gold therefore benefited the European merchant, who could speculate on the exchange rate by acquiring gold in Asia and exchanging it for silver on the Rialto.

After 1349, with the progressive devaluation of gold in Europe, the exchange rate settled at an average of 1:10, and rose to 1:11 only at the end of the century. A similar mechanism is found in the relationship between the two metals between Persia and India. Here too, differences in value facilitated the flow of gold from Persia (where it was cheaper) to India.

The fact that monetary circulation was also and above all influenced by political decisions within each khanate probably constituted the main obstacle to the systematization of international instruments of exchange. Through monetary reforms, the various states had tried to

alter the value of silver and gold coins according to needs, caused for example by military spending, or by a reduction in taxes due to drops in production. The costs related to the war were met by devaluing silver coins and thus minting a greater number of coins with the same quantity of metal. This obviously had an inflationary effect on the general economy, forcing the Ilkhanids, for example, to introduce reforms and corrections.

In general it was in the merchant's interest that the various currencies had stable and commensurable values, and for this reason silver, in all its forms, was never given up as a primary vehicle of exchange. This standard, created by the Mongols for transactions within their empire, not only commercial but also fiscal and tax (the remittances from the aristocratic appanages which we mentioned above) intersects with the Venetian coinage, which had already issued the bulk as currency for some time of reference, and from this meeting the foundations are laid for a simplification of exchange rates, mediated by the sum, i.e. by silver in bars, measured by weight and minted according to local needs. The presence of bimetallism is due to its prevalence in northern and western Europe, as well as in Egypt and the Maghreb and India. An international trading system could not operate according to a single standard, and if this created imbalances and instability, it nevertheless allowed Venice, as the main place for the trade of precious metals, to benefit from it.

If in the Islamic, Persian, and Chinese world the economy was largely monetized, in the northern steppes and in the Rus' principalities barter, corvée and other forms of exchange were still prevalent at the end of the 13th century. Before the political stabilization that followed the conquests, barter was widespread, but was [never](#) completely abandoned.

– In exchanges with and between foreign merchants, finished products were sometimes used, especially cloth and cloth, but normally silver was used, in ingots or coins. The Saraj mint in turn produced a silver coin, tamgha, linked to the withdrawal system we mentioned above; for a sum one obtained 120 tamgha.

[8](#) For Venetian merchants, silver coin, cloth and precious stones were the most widespread and commonly accepted means of exchange on the markets of the Golden Horde. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the means of payment that the Venetians used in transactions with various European or Middle Eastern partners and those that were instead used in exchanges with the local population. If among Latin merchants, but also Muslims, Armenians, Jews and Greeks who resided more or less permanently in Crimea, the means of payment used was exclusively money, with the Mongols it was not unusual to conclude transactions

transactions by exchanging their goods, especially cloth, with other goods. [9](#)

Gold ducats and large silver ducats circulated in the Venetian settlements (as well as other coins such as hyperperies, florins and genovins), but according to Pegolotti the most widespread instrument of exchange in Tana remained the sommi and the asper coins, which, as we have already underlined, were the coins that most conformed to the silver standard in force in the Mongol Empire. The Florentine merchant's statement is confirmed by Venetian notarial deeds. In addition to the sours, small copper fullers were in circulation, the exchange rate of which was 1/16 with the sour. The folero was the currency in use for small daily transactions, used only for "herbs and small and necessary things for the earth".

[10](#)

Most of the circulating coins were probably produced in Tana, where there was a mint. At the end of the 13th century the harsh baricates (so called because they were introduced by the first khan of the Golden Horde Berke) were widely spread, especially due to the ease in establishing equivalences with other. The internal economy of the Golden Horde, stimulated Certainly silver coins. from the [11](#) opening to international trade, it grew constantly in the first half of the fourteenth century. At the same time the sour depreciated, probably due to the wear and tear and progressive instability of with a higher value. [13](#) The sour nouveau remained, alongside the [12](#) current coins, a new one other coins and sums, the reference currency for all transactions in Tana and on the North Pontic markets. In the second half of the fourteenth century this currency was used especially in the buying and selling of slaves, buildings and land. However, it was less widespread in the exchange of goods and in the establishment of companies, loans, bequests and more, where the sum of silver was preferred.

The sour baricate did not disappear from the transactions, but is mentioned less and [less](#) in the documents.

3. *Coinage in Venice*

The 13th century was a period of great changes also in European and Mediterranean monetary policy and Venice was no exception. Venice's commercial interests in the Mediterranean in the 12th-13th centuries were concentrated between Fatimid Egypt and the Byzantine Empire, and in those markets the Venetians used local currencies, respectively Arab dinars and Byzantine hyperperes. In the Byzantine Empire, the First Crusade was a turning point regarding monetary parameters. Between the end of the 11th and the first years of the 12th century, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos launched a vast reform which also involved the

tax system, introduced new currencies, with the aim of creating a currency system that remained stable over time. The spearhead of Alexios' reform was the new hyperperus (*nomisma hyperpyron*) which upon its institution, in 1092, was minted in 20½ carat fine gold weighing 4.1 grams.

¹⁵ The emperor's initiative intervened to resolve a situation of structural, characterized economic crisis

by growing public spending and unstoppable monetary devaluation.

¹⁶

The minting of new coins guaranteed a period of stability and the value of the hyperpero remained substantially unchanged for almost the entire 12th century. it largely dealt with ¹⁷ Yes gold coins, like all the currency that circulated in the East and in the Islamic world in particular.

¹⁸

During the dogate of Vitale Michiel (r. 1155-1172) Venice had resumed minting denarii, called *albus* or *blanchi*. These coins did not bear any iconographic reference to the Germanic emperor, but bore the name of

doge, with the inscription «Michil Dux». ¹⁹ Michiel's experiment did not last long, but the ²⁰ introduction of this new currency opened the way for a new phase of financial expansion, bringing immediate benefits to the local business class, which could count on a stable payment instrument whose value was below control of the state and was therefore accepted even outside the city limits.

The birth of the Latin kingdoms of the East, the expansion of trade in the Levant, and the opening of new transit routes created by the Crusades expanded the flow of silver that poured from Europe onto the eastern markets, where it had a from the second half of the 12th century higher value. it ²¹ this influx

mitigated the silver shortage that had characterized the Asian areas up to that point, but it was not enough to reverse the trend of overvaluation of silver compared to gold.

²² During the dogate of Enrico Dandolo (r. 1192-23 at the transition between the 12th and 13th centuries, Venice minted the bulk, a 1205 coin), silver with a high degree of purity.

²⁴ This new monetary instrument served primarily to facilitate transactions with high-value amounts. ²⁵ The success of the large Venetian one was followed by issues by other Italian municipalities. Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Siena and Verona began to mint their own silver coins starting from the 1330s, although Venice had the advantage of a greater availability of metal, coming from the mines of Tyrol. The import of silver further increased throughout Western Europe from the mid-13th century thanks to new mines opened in Bohemia and the Carpathians.

²⁶

The minting of the Grosso in particular facilitated the expansion of the turnover of the Venetian merchants in the East in the second half of the 13th century, for

then extend to Romania.

²⁷

In these areas the sour was used together with or as an alternative to the silver hyperperes minted in the successor states of the Byzantine Empire after the Fourth Crusade, issued for example by the Nicaean mint, while Trebizond began to strike its own silver coin – the sour – and copper coins in imitation of those that had been in use in Byzantium since the 1930s.

From 1250, a policy of supporting commercial expansion with the production of new gold coins was launched in various Italian cities and European states. Genoa and Florence in 1252 minted the genovino and the florin respectively.

Lucca (1256) and Perugia (1259) followed, and then the English and French monarchies. However, none of the gold coins were an immediate success. The Florin florin only became widespread at the end of the century, when the Pope made it the currency for the collection of the Holy See's revenues. ²⁹ the florin itself constituted the model of the Venetian Grand Council when in October 1284, with 21 votes in favor and 7 against, it approved the minting of ³⁰ The ducat became a ducat, a coin even more valuable than that of [—] AND Florence. officially in force in March 1285 and introduced the bimetallic system to Venice for the first time. These coins, used mainly in international transactions, were accompanied by coins for low-value transactions (denari, or small lira) and the large lira, a currency of used above all in financial transactions and material tax. In the Byzantine areas of expansion of Venetian ^{account}, and therefore virtual, and Genoese trade, in particular beyond the Dardanelles, the empire nevertheless attempted to maintain its prerogatives in the issuing of coins, and even when Genoa obtained the right to settle in Pera, in 1304, among the clauses there was an explicit prohibition for the Genoese to ^{coin} money.

Therefore, a complex system of exchanges and uses of different currencies was established which on the one hand supported the entry of Genoese and Venetian merchants into large-scale international traffic, and on the other made the merchant's profession, at least in these areas, ever more specialized. When the center of gravity of trade shifted towards the Black Sea and the Asian routes, a further process of adaptation to the monetary regimes in force in the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate was necessary, which as we have seen materialized with the diffusion of the supreme as the main instrument of coinage and exchange both in Tana and in the Iranian and Central Asian markets. The first issues of silver ingots in Venice date back to 1273, with characteristics similar to the bulk: the effigy of Christ on one side and that of St. Mark on the other. ³²

In the 14th century the ratio of gold to silver fluctuated considerably Venice, due to a major devaluation in the first quarter of the century,

followed by a sudden devaluation of gold in the following decades. The higher value of silver relative to gold in the Mongolian territories and in Asia generally encouraged speculation in the transfer of metals between different markets. The lower cost of gold relative to silver across the Black Sea, Iranian and Central Asian markets led to an increased flow of silver from west to east. It is important here to quote Pegolotti, who gives us an exchange table of the sum that effectively connects the entire economy of the Black Sea: «Sommo 1 d'ariento della Tana is calculated in Pera perperi 9 di Pera, and the sum weighs 7 ounces 1/2 of a Pear, and is an alloy of 11 ounces and 17 denarii of fine silver per pound." ³³ Together with the supreme, the Venetians in the East mainly used the as demonstrated by the notarial documentation —

of the Crimea and the Big Sea, of Azov. Furthermore, the large lira was the nominal reference ³⁴ currency, particularly useful for overcoming exchange difficulties between physically circulating larges and local coinage. ³⁵ In practice, a system was created in which the privileged currencies were sums, silver larges and liras. When first minted they had the same quality of silver as the bulk (0.965 fine), but soon less pure ingots (0.925 fine) called sterling were minted. ³⁶ Just like money, silver bars also depreciated over the years.

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³⁷

Furthermore, as we said above, the Venetian authorities allowed private workshops to produce small silver ingots, with the same purity as large bars, but weighing 200-400 grams intended specifically for the Golden Horde markets. ³⁸

4. *Communication: translators and interpreters*

Venice has been, since its foundation, a polyglot and multicultural space. The Venetians of the Middle Ages were accustomed to cultural diversity and merchants who resided abroad for more or less long periods were prepared to communicate even in linguistically foreign contexts. The case of the Mongol Empire was not in itself an exception, but it opened up new spaces, despite the fact that news about Mongol society and customs had already filtered into Europe since the 1340s. The multitude of languages and dialects encountered in the Levantine and Asian bazaars required complex linguistic knowledge, and from the second half of the 13th century interpreters and translators, two activities often carried out by the same person, became real professional figures. The “Turcimanni” or “dragomanni”, as they were called from the Arabic term *targumān* for “interpreter”, were used not only in

oral communication, but also in chancelleries for the translation of official documents, agreements, commercial agreements, and contracts, and added costs to the budget of embassies, consulates and commercial transactions. ³⁹ Mongolian was used in various court settings to—

draft official documents, but there was no lingua franca that served as a universal communication tool. In the local bureaucracies of the various khanates, the written languages of the conquered peoples, who had a broader base of skills, dominated. Mongolian, in Uyghur script, remained confined to restricted circles of the aristocracy, who in the generations following the conquest were often polyglot and cosmopolitan. A refined intellectual like Ata Malik ⁴⁰

Juvaini (1226-1284), Persian historian and minister in the service of the Mongol khans, associated ⁴¹ the spread and dignity achieved by the Mongolian language in the years in which he was governor of Baghdad with the cultural decadence of the Arab world. However, there were widespread languages reasons, ⁴² that they facilitated the shutters. communications. For both demographic and cultural Persian and Turkish spread to different levels of civil and political society in Western and Central Asia until they took over. Even in China, if we are to trust Marco Polo's experience, they were languages regularly used in court environments and in the Mongol administration, before the use of Chinese was reaffirmed.

In the Western settlements on the Black Sea, the coexistence between different communities created conditions of proximity between customs, traditions, cultures and languages of all kinds. Tana was no exception, and precisely because of its role as a commercial exchange center different populations met there. Each community probably used the vernacular language internally, and the Venetians used both the vernacular and, for the majority of official documents, Latin, while wills from the mid-fourteenth century were drawn up in the vernacular and then translated into Latin. In communication with the local population, the most common language in Tana, and more generally in the northern Black Sea, was Cumanic Turkish, widespread in northern Caucasus and in the western steppe belt. The *Codex Cumanicus*, a trilingual glossary (Latin, Persian and ⁴³ dating back to the beginning of Cumanic) composed of several parts and subsequent additions, 14th century, is the tangible example of the linguistic skills required of Italian merchants. Juvaini writes that after having the governor of Khorasan Chin Tēmür, the secretary of state Sharaf ad-Dīn served for a few months with Dīn (d. 1245), he had learned Turkish and therefore "no longer needed interpreters" to travel.

Venetian-Mongolian. When, in 1333, Venice and Uzbek Khan signed the agreement that allowed the Serenissima to settle in Tana, the diplomats drafted the document in Cumanic and the Polish Dominican Domenico translated it into Latin. ⁴⁵ Benedetto was also Polish, companion and interpreter of Giovanni di Pian del Carpine when he, in 1245, undertook the mission *to Tartaros* and reached Karakorum. Benedict was able to assist Brother John as far as Batu Khan's camp, presumably knowing the Slavic languages very well, but for the rest of the way the Franciscan had to hire two other interpreters, both Turkish: Temur and Shonkkur. ⁴⁶ Turkish was therefore essential for traveling to the Mongol empire via the northern routes and this situation, according to the sources we have, remained unchanged between Pian del Carpine's journey in 1245, and the 1430s or 1440s, when Pegolotti compiles his mercantile manual.

47

Pegolotti states that «[t]urcimanci in several languages, and calamanci in Tartaresque [i.e. Mongolian, from *kelemenġij*], they are people who temper and make languages understood from one language to another that are not understood and recommend to interpreter⁴⁸ merchants who want to do the «together journey», ⁴⁹ to bring an the need who knows «the Cuman language well». As a merchant himself, Pegolotti felt for a system of measurement that was universally understandable. Every time he lists weights, measures, names of more or less well-known products, he prefaces "in multiple languages" or "in multiple languages". Pegolotti again specifies in another passage that the turcimanni had to be hired without paying too much attention to savings because "the good man is no longer the greedy one who doesn't get any better".

Tana had an interpreter who worked permanently at the Venetian curia and who did not always prove to be up to such a delicate task. ⁵¹

In August 1370 the consul complained to the senate that the interpreter was not working well. ⁵² The authorities recommended him to evaluate whether it was possible to make him improve, and otherwise suggested firing him and hiring a more efficient one. The importance of the task⁵³ is confirmed by the amount that the Senate made available to the consul to hire an interpreter and translator: 30 sums per year. But the interpreters were not only local. A certain Niccolò Darcero (nostrum venetum) enjoyed a good reputation in Tana, so much so that the senate allowed the consul to increase his salary up to 36 annual sums in order to secure his services.

In addition to Turkish, Persian was widespread, which was the cultured language of much of Central Asia. The letters that Güyük delivered to the Franciscan delegation led by Pian del Carpine and intended for Pope Innocent IV were written in

Mongolian and it was thanks to the Cuman interpreters that the Franciscan was able to translate the letters into Latin. However, alongside the Latin translation it was also necessary to provide a Persian translation.

⁵⁴ When, in 1247, another delegation of missionaries sent by Pope Innocent IV and led by the Dominican Ascelinus of Cremona reached the Mongol commander Baiju Noyan in the Caucasus, it was necessary to translate two of the pontiff's letters from Latin into Mongolian. In this Ascelinus was aided by interpreters who translated from Latin into Persian and from Persian into Mongolian. During his trip to Karakorum in 1253, he was accompanied by an interpreter whom he called *homo dei*. He turned out to be unreliable as he was "of low intelligence" but above all excessively addicted to alcohol. When Rubruck found himself in the presence of Khan Möngke, and needed an interpreter, *homo dei* due to his state of intoxication was unable to communicate a single word of Möngke's speech.

⁵⁶ It is therefore not surprising that Rubruck often recommends in his *Itinerarium* to hire good interpreters regardless of expense.

Latin was used by the Venetian authorities for legal writings as it was still the formal language of Western bureaucracies. However, the vernacular was also widespread in Venice, and there are quite a few wills drawn up in Tana by Venetian citizens written in a mixed language: protocol and escatocol in Latin and body in the vernacular. Usually the notary himself asked the testator whether he wanted to proceed in Latin or in the vernacular. Even diplomatic documentation is sometimes written in the vernacular, and there is no shortage of examples of letters from Mongolian khans or Egyptian sultans translated into Venetian alongside Latin, and sometimes in its place. It was not ⁵⁷ Ghazan only Latinos who learned foreign languages. According to Rashid knew Latin perfectly, along with Chinese, Arabic, Persian and other languages. At ⁵⁸ ad-Din, he the Ilkhanid court, in general, the use of Latin was not a given the conspicuous presence of Westerners in Tabriz and in the other cities of the Ilkhanate.

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In conclusion, although the sources at our disposal are not sufficient to illustrate the variety of solutions and experiences related to the issue of communication through different languages, written but above all oral, it is certain that there was an enormous effort on both sides to overcome the linguistic distances and equip themselves with adequate tools to face a world that is even more polyglot and multicultural than the Mediterranean one.

5. Weights and measures

The Venetians who lived and worked on the Black Sea, in Tana and Tabriz

they had to manage a complex and diverse measurement system which, as with coins and exchange rates, required specialist skills. Having said this, a certain coherence can be found in the fact that, not only on the Black Sea, but also in Iran and Central Asia, Genoese units of measurement dominated, or in any case measures borrowed from Genoese ones. This was due not only to the dominant position of Genoa, but above all to the delay with which the Venetians landed on the Black Sea.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, from 1261 onwards, it was the Genoese who dictated the rules of the game, first from Pera and then from Caffa. Venice had to adapt its "gauge" to the furrows already traced by the Genoese penetration into Gazaria, Persia, and elsewhere. Aside from the Genoese ones, Tana also used measurements presumably based on local customs, or on standards introduced by the Mongols - although the sources are not explicit about this - which were converted into measurements commonly used by Venetian merchants.

Pegolotti illustrates this situation well in relation to the units in use specifically in Tana, such as the *cascito*, the pound of Tana, and the *tocchetto*. The *cascito* corresponded to just over five Venetian bushels and was used to weigh dry goods, especially cereals. ⁵⁹ Alongside the *cascito*, the *cantaro* and the pound of Tana often occur as units of weight.

⁶⁰ The goods were weighed in pounds of Tana plus ⁶¹ substances including wax, *tabdanum* (*cistus villosus*) – a resin with aroma of heavy vanilla used to flavor foods – pepper, ginger and «all the coarse spices», i.e. the less refined ones. Metals were weighed in large pounds, such as iron, copper and tin, but also cotton, madder - a vegetable much in demand for dyeing fabrics - skins, parchments, tallow for making candles, cheese, flax, oil and fruit. Instead, all the lighter spices and the more expensive goods such as silk, saffron and amber were weighed in thin pounds, which Pegolotti says was purchased "worked in the paternostri way", that is, in grains.

Furs and skins, widespread items in the Golden Horde markets, were traded in quantity. For example, ermine furs were bought by the thousands, as were vai (squirrels), whereas, for Pegolotti, «you would give 1020 for a thousand». They required a high investment for processing costs, and in Tana they could easily be found because they came from the north along the routes that had connected the Baltic Sea with the Byzantine Empire since the early Middle Ages. ⁶² The other furs traded were foxes, sables, martens, martens, and wolves. But the geographical proximity with nomadic tribes north of the Black Sea also made bovine skins available (*ox hide* according to Pegolotti

⁶³) and equines, which sometimes appear in the signed sales deeds
by notaries. ⁶⁴

The fishing industry was very active in Tana, in particular fishing and sturgeon farming, which were sold dried, purchased in bundles of 20, and sometimes appear in Venetian notarial documents as collateral for money loans. ⁶⁵ Goat skins were also bought in bundles, while ox skins were sold at a price of one hundred pieces each. Much appreciated, ⁶⁶ The *fusco* «full of as well as expensive, was the caviar, which was bought by the *fuschi*. fish eggs" is a problematic Pegolotti it corresponded to the lower half of the fish ("from the middle term, and according to down to the tail"). In other words this was most likely a unit of measurement used only for caviar, and varied based on the size of the fish itself. Caviar arrived in Tana from the coastal ports of the Sea of Azov, was loaded onto ships and transported throughout Romania as far as Constantinople.

⁶⁷ In Tana the *tocchetto* was also in use, a unit of weight of around 800 grams used for anything sold in pieces. Wines were sold in barrels. Interestingly, wines ⁶⁸ Pegolotti is not small. specifies the volume of the barrel, but states that «all Latin are sold by the barrel as it is». ⁶⁹ Fine wines such as Malvasia, as well as other wines produced on the Aegean islands, were sold by the *miter* (metres), where one *miter* was the equivalent of just over ten litres. ⁷⁰

Even in Tabriz the measures of the Ligurian city dominated. The heaviest spices sold for hundreds of *mene* (i.e. *mines*). ⁷¹ The *lead* was also a unit for measuring arid materials, especially salt, in use in Genoa and Florence, where and in the Mongol was worth half a bushel, ⁷³ ⁷² empire it acquired different values in different countries. The *lead* was markets. — also used to weigh silk and linen, coral, amber, silver, cinnabar, and tin. *Subtle* spices were sold for "tens of *mina*", or 1/10 of a mina. Woolen cloths were calculated on the basis of the piece (one piece corresponded to approximately twenty-five meters of cloth, i.e. 2 peaks and a third calculating the peak at 61 cm) as were the camels (*donuts*), rough cloths similar to wool, but made from camel hair or goat wool. Pegolotti uses the term *garbellare* for the sifting of cloths and spices.

This was normally taken care of by the seller with the exception of lacquer, the refining of which was entrusted to both the seller and the buyer. ⁷⁴ Unlike cloths,

canvases were measured at a shorter peak, 40 instead of 61cm. The rolls of silk were sold in pieces while the tea towels were sold "at a high price".

The "Gazeria peak" was a unit of length equivalent to about 60 centimeters.

From Urgench a yarn was imported which would later take the name of the city, organza, which was usually sold in public bazaars. ⁷⁵ Gems, gold and pearls were sold for sages and silver for carats. ⁷⁶

6. Duties and taxes

Merchants were subject to a tax, the *tamunga*,⁷⁷ which in Tabriz consisted of five bezants

less half a sour for every 100 bezants of the total value of the goods transported. Among the goods that the Venetians sold, wool, canvas, furs and tin paid the least, four bezants minus a third of asper per 100. Precious items were free goods and did not pay any tax. Half a sour for every 100 for the *sensing* service (mediation) had to be added to the withdrawal. The intermediary also had to pay a tip, "what you like to do as a courtesy to the broker", says Pegolotti.

⁷⁸

Since the Tabriz market was directly connected to the ports of Laiazzo and Trebizond, Pegolotti writes that «The weight and measure of Torisi is one with that of Trebizond». ⁷⁹ Venetian merchants unloaded galleys in the two ports and transported the goods in caravans to the Ilkhanate capital. What they purchased in Tabriz then traveled in the opposite direction, in the direction of Venice. In Laiazzo, in the years in which Pegolotti wrote his manual, the Genoese and Venetians did not pay any duties, neither for imported nor exported goods. The Pisan merchants, now incapable in those years of managing trade with the markets of the eastern Mediterranean, were instead subject to a 2% tax on the total value of both incoming and outgoing goods transported.⁸⁰

In Trebizond no entry or exit duty was paid, while all merchants, except the Genoese, paid a 3% tax on sales. ⁸¹ In the event that the goods unloaded in the port of Trebizond were destined for the market of Tabriz, a fixed tax of 28 aspers of Trebizond for each soma had to be paid to the central treasury plus one asper for each soma to the city administration. Goods traveling the reverse route, from Tabriz to the port of Trebizond, paid 14 aspers per sum to the treasury plus the usual asper to the city.

According to Pegolotti, the import duty in Tana was equal to 4% of the value of the goods sold by the Genoese and Venetians, while everyone else paid 5%. Exported goods were not subject to customs tariffs. Gold, silver and precious stones were also exempt from tax, while silk paid 15 aspers per pound. ⁸²

¹. Buenger Robbert, *The monetary system*, pp. 410-411.

². «All the silver that the merchants bring [...] the lord of the Gattaio has it taken for himself and puts it in his treasury, and the merchants who bring it there give them pappier coin»: Pegolotti, *The practice of mercantile*, p. 23. Pegolotti's statement is confirmed by contracts found in Central Asia and referable to the Chagadaide khanate (Kuroda, *The Eurasian Silver Century*, p. 262). We will return to ingots, *in short*, a little later.

³. The term, of Persian origin, literally means cushion; in China *balish* was the term that i

Italian merchants believed it was used to indicate paper money: «pappiero coin, that is, yellow paper minted from the bull of the said lord [del Gattaio], which coin is called balisci» (Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, pp. 22-23) .

4. In a careful study, A. Kuroda suggested that the great diffusion of silver throughout Eurasia from the mid-13th to the mid-14th century was a consequence of the injection of "white" metal by the Mongols. Confirmation of this theory is the reversal of trend that occurred at the beginning of the 15th century, when circulating silver significantly decreased everywhere, from China to the Black Sea.

Furthermore, chemical analyzes revealed that the silver circulating in Central Asia, the Crimea, Persia and even England during the period under consideration was most likely produced in China. Kuroda, *The Eurasian Silver Century*, pp. 254-255.

5. Franke, *Ajmad*, pp. 539-557; Atwood, *Encyclopaedia of Mongolia*, p. 5.

6. Kuroda, *Why and How*, pp. 29-30.

7. Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 645; Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde*, pp. 330-331.

8. Kuroda, *The Eurasian Silver Century*, p. 261; Tarifa, ed. Orlandini, p. 18, where the text, probably contemporary with Pegolotti's *Pratica* , provides data from a few decades later and uses the dialectical plural *tangi*.

9. Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 645.

10. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 25.

11. The estimate is based on documents produced in Caffa by the Genoese notary Lamberto di Sambuceto, studied by GI Bratianu and M. Balard (Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 659). At the height of the fourteenth century the ratio between sour and large was almost 2 to 1 (1.66 sour for a large). Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, p. 300 and n. 44.

12. According to Balard up to 40%; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 660.

13. In the 1340s the exchange rate between asper nuova and sommo must have been around 1/55, i.e. more than triple that of asper baricato. Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 660; Balbi, Raiteri, *Genoese Notaries overseas*, p. 141.

14. Although it is difficult to establish a fixed or official exchange rate, from notarial deeds it can be seen that in Tana in 1359 the ratio between sour and som varies from 1/170 to 1/190, while it remains in an average ratio of 1/30 between harsh and ducat, with some variations. In the 1960s the new sour also depreciated, with a ratio between sour and sour of 1/200.

15. Exactly what Frederick II's Augustale will be like. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy*, pp. 513-514. The first documentary mention of *the hyperpero* dates back to 1093, in the will of S. Cristodulus of Patmos (Bertelè, *Venetian coin*, p. 5 and note 1).

16. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy*, p. 516.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 517.

18. The many studies on the availability and use of precious metals have shown that until the end of the 11th century throughout Asia and in the Byzantine Empire almost exclusively gold coins circulated. Kuroda, *Why and How*, pp. 23-25.

19. Vitale Michiel's denarius, which has survived in very few examples, is also called a half denarius although its weight and fineness (0.517 grams and 70/1000 fine silver) bring it closer to the value of a third of a denarius, as noted by Buenger Robbert (*The monetary system*). See also Buenger Robbert, *The Venetian Money Market*, pp. 28-29 and Papadopoli, *The coins of Venice*, pp. 61-68.

20. As we saw in the first chapter, the doge was assassinated on his return from Constantinople after the disastrous expedition against Manuel Comnenus in 1171 and the subsequent plague epidemic that hit the city.

21. Watson, *Back to Gold*, p. 5 in which for the period considered he expressly speaks of «Silver famine of the Muslim World». It is a situation confirmed by Kuroda's most recent studies (*The Eurasian Silver Century*, pp. 254-260 and *Why and How*, pp. 25-26).

22. Watson, *Back to Gold*, pp. 6-7.

23. Stahl, *Zecca*, p. 17.

24. 98.5% fine and 2.18 grams in weight. At the dawn of the 13th century the large Venetian was exchanged for 26 denarii, now called small; in 1350 for a large one 48 small denarii were needed. Papadopoli, *Sul*

value of the Venetian currency, pp. 11-12; Bertelè, *Venetian currency*, pp. 5-7.

[25.](#) Luzzatto, *Economic history of Venice*, p. ninety two.

[26.](#) Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, pp. 168 and 287; Kuroda, *The Eurasian Silver Century*, p. 251.

[27.](#) Bertelè, *Venetian currency*, p. 6; Buenger, Robbert, *The monetary system*, pp. 416-417. It was a coin with a high intrinsic and stable value, therefore much in demand by the merchants with whom the Venetians did business.

[28.](#) We will return to the coinage in Trebizond later. Hendy, *Studies in Byzantine Monetary Economy*, pp. 522-524.

[29.](#) Stahl, *Zecca*, p. 212.

[30.](#) «Tam bona et fina per aurum, vel melior ut est florenu». Stahl, *Zecca*, p. 31.

[31.](#) Balard, *La Romania génoise*, p. 644.

[32.](#) Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, p. 162.

[33.](#) Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 53.

[34.](#) Day, *Banking and money in Venice*, p. 740.

[35.](#) Shortly after the minting of the gold coin, and in any case after 1250, the value of the *lira* was set at 1/240 of the gold coin, i.e. one *lira* was the equivalent of 240 gold coins of silver. See also Papadopoli, *Bimetallism in Venice*, pp. 201-202.

[36.](#) Pegolotti mentions both (*pounds and rods of the bull of Venice*), p. 61. The last mint to receive *sterling* was that of Laiazzo, which in 1347 fell into the hands of the Mamluks. Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, p. 163.

[37.](#) In their very careful study RC Mueller and F. Lane calculated that the purity of the ingots Venetians went from 0.965 in 1273 to 0.949 in 1422 (*Money and banking*, vol. 2, p. 164 and n. 8 and 9).

[38.](#) These ingots, "as small as a lady's finger", were produced by private laboratories and not by the state mint. They were called "verge d'ariento de sumo" (*verge d'ariento de sumo*: Mueller, Lane, *Money and banking*, vol. 2, p. 164 and n. 10).

[39.](#) Sinor, *Pray to God on my behalf*, p. 178.

[40.](#) Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, II, p. 523.

[41.](#) According to Juvaini, Chinggis Khan knew only Mongolian (*The History of the World Conqueror*, I, p. 225. Born in 1226 in Khorasan, Juvaini came from a family of court bureaucrats, first in the service of the Seljuks and then of the sultan Chorasmius. His younger brother Šams-al-Din Mo'ammad married the daughter of Ar'yun j'q', governor of Khorasan and close advisor to the ilkhān Hülegü who appointed him j'yyeb(-e) div'n, in practice minister of finance. Ata Malik was an influential figure at the Ilkhanid court, personal advisor to the emir Arghūn Aqa, in 1259 he was appointed governor of Baghdad by Hülegü, author of one of the most detailed histories of the Mongols, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā* (Boyle, *The History of the World Conqueror*). However it reaches up to 1260, over twenty years before his death in 1284.

[42.](#) Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, I, pp. 7 and 98; II, p. 523. This last passage in particular shows Juvaini's irony when he says that the son of the emir Khoja Fakhr-ad-Din Bihishti was the youngest because "he could write the Mongolian language in Uyghur", a sign that he was a recent acquisition at the beginning of the Ilkhanate of Arghun in 1258, "and this is, in the present day, the essence of knowledge and expertise."

[43.](#) The document, produced for the use of merchants who frequented the ports and settlements of Crimea, is preserved in the Marciana National Library of Venice (Cod. Mar. Lat. 549). Its dating is uncertain. The first sheet of the manuscript that we possess was written in July 1303 (f. 1r), but some parts of the text seem older, others are the result of overlapping and subsequent redactions. In addition to the document, see Schmieder, Schreiner, *The Cumanic Code and its World*. There is also a more recent edition of the Codex in Turkish, edited by Güner, *Kuman Bilmeceleleri*.

[44.](#) Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, II, p. 523.

[45.](#) *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 243-244.

[46.](#) Sinor, *Pray to God on my behalf*, p. 179. Which Brother John calls *Tartars*: «nobis Dati fuerunt et tres Tartari, due qui erant decani et alius rat homo Bati». Pian Del Carpine, *Historia Mongalorum*, pp. 308-

309.

47. On the dating of Pegolotti's *Pratica* see Sinclair, *Eastern Trade and the Mediterranean*, pp. 4 and following.

48. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 19.

49. That is, Cathay, from the name of the Khitans, who had dominated part of northern China, with the dynastic name Liao, from the 10th to the 12th century.

50. The phrase, although difficult to translate literally, indicates that by spending more you ultimately spend less, since a bad interpreter turns out to be a bad investment ("greedy"), while a good one, although more expensive, brings advantages to those who hire it compared to how much they spend ("it doesn't get any better"). See also *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean world*, p. 356, note 54.

51. In 1359 the interpreter of the consul Pietro Caravaello was Guglielmo Bon, a Venetian. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 13v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 85, p. 41. In 1383 it was Pietro known as Gata. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 13v.

52. «Non attendit ad curiam cosulis et ad negotia que sibi committuntur»: *Venice Senate*.

Mixed deliberations, XX, p. 248.

53. It is interesting to note that the Senate recommends to the consul of Tana the utmost caution and respect for the law – *cum maxima sufficientia et legetate* – in case he decides to fire the interpreter and hire a new one. *Ibid*.

54. Pian del Carpine, *Historia Mongalorum*, pp. 308-309; Sinor, *Pray to God on my Behalf*, p. 180.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 180: Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen-Age*.

56. Sinor, *Pray to God on my Behalf*, p. 180. Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, ed. Jackson, Morgan, p. 134.

57. Rashid ad-Din, *Compendium*, p. 465.

58. Hope, *Power, Politics, and Tradition*, p. 179; Meyavaert, *An Unknown Letter of Hulagu*, pp. 250-251.

59. According to Pegolotti, a *cascito* of "biado" in Tana corresponded to 5 Venetian bushels. If the Venetian bushel measured 83.31 litres, a *cascito* amounted to 416.55 litres, which the Venetians then converted into bushels; where a bushel of Venice was equivalent to 4 bushels for a total of 333.24 litres. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 25; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, ff. 19r and 19r; Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 16r.

60. Notaries used the cantaro as a measure of weight for any merchandise. One cantaro corresponded to 100 rolls, 5 mena, or 150 Genoese pounds. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, fr. 12v, 17v and 22r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 80, 104 and 128, pp. 40, 47 and 54.

61. For example, 26 wax cantari were calculated «ad pondum Tane», or in pounds of Tana. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 16r.

62. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 43r.

63. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24.

64. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 33r.

65. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 32r; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 17v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 188, p. 70.

66. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 1v, 14v.

67. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 14v, 17v.

68. For example wax. ASV, CI, envelope 19, reg. 3, ff. 25r-26r; Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24.

69. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25 and 53; *Tarifa*, ed. Orlandini, p. 47. The documents in which miter wine is mentioned are many. See ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, f. 3r-v, 12r-13r, 20r-23r.

71. On the mine and its use in the fourteenth century, see Giangiacovo, *Notes on mercantile metrology*, pp. 121-122.

72. However, in the Mongol Empire, salt was weighed by the bushel (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 30, fasc. 7/B, f. 14v), as well as in Constantinople and Pera (Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, p. 39).

73. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 147.

[74.](#) Ibid., p. 27: «one half belongs to the seller and the other to the buyer».

[75.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 37v.

[76.](#) One essay, according to Pegolotti, had a weight of 4.38 grams. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, pp. 25-26.

[77.](#) See above.

[78.](#) Ibid., p. 28.

[79.](#) Ibid., p. 29

[80.](#) Ibid., p. 60.

[81.](#) Ibid., p. 31.

[82.](#) Ibid., p. 25.

11. Goods, commodities and slaves

1. *The goods*

Fernand Braudel wrote that the trade circuits are like those. And so it was with Venice's trade ¹ electric: they only work if they are closed. — with the Levant: a flow of products directed towards the East corresponded to a flow, not necessarily equivalent, of products that followed the opposite path.

Although the fourteenth century - particularly the second half - was undoubtedly a difficult period in Europe as in Asia, in Venice the influx of goods from the East did not decrease, on the contrary it increased and diversified.

Imports of spices increased, arriving in Rialto on the Romanian-Black Sea galleys. Among them, pepper from India, ginger from the Middle East, cloves and cinnamon from the Indian subcontinent were of great importance. But it wasn't just the so-called light goods that guaranteed high profits.

In the fourteenth century it was above all the "large" goods - wheat, salt, oil and silk - of Pontic origin that established themselves on Western markets. Subsequently, from the mid-14th century, the quantity of slaves that merchants purchased in Tana or in the innermost cities of the Golden Horde and resold both on nearby markets and in Venice also significantly increased.

Until the Treaty of Nymphaeum, Italian merchants had supplied themselves with exotic products, such as spices, cotton, sugar, linen, silk, rose water and pearls, in three large markets in the eastern Mediterranean: Acre, Alessandria and Laiazzo. The products traveling in the opposite direction were above all Apulian olive oil, Sicilian wheat, Calabrian wine, Neapolitan walnuts, Marseille cloths and the Sicilian wines of Messina² and Scalea. ³ Already with the Fourth Crusade, and even more so from 1261 with the opening of the Black Sea, the trade space could count on secure bases and supports which gave regularity to transport in both directions. To the traditional markets of North Africa, Constantinople and

of Palestine were added those on the Anatolian coast of Trebizond and Smisso, in addition to the Crimea, from which grain was imported, the Sea of Azov, from where they mainly shipped fish, wax, furs, dried fruit, wine, slaves, and cereals, and finally central and eastern Asia, from which silk of different qualities came to Venice.

4

The sources show a change in the types of goods exchanged in Crimea, and in Tana in particular, starting from the early 14th century. If at the end of the 13th century most of the goods bought and sold in the region by Latin merchants were predominantly local products, two decades later goods of Asian origin increased. The opening of the Central Asian Mongolian Route, which had its western terminus at Tana, increased the flow of goods produced in China, Central Asia, and the Baltic. 5 On the other hand, Venice's trade with the Mongol empire, and with Tana in particular, was always seasonal, linked to the synchronism between the voyages of the liner galleys that set sail from Venice and the caravans that arrived from Asia on the Black Sea.

The Mongols had developed corporate and partnership forms between aristocracy and merchants that were perfectly legible in a context of international cooperation between Latin and Oriental merchants, and supported by legal and administrative structures that facilitated their operations. While commercial activities produced high profits for the state, the imperial officials of the Golden Horde guaranteed the merchants who operated on their territory generally favorable conditions and fiscal privileges established in the treaties with Genoa and Venice. Emporia located in Mongolian territory also took advantage of their proximity to East Asian markets. The Mongols also gained on the outgoing and incoming flow of goods in terms of tariff revenue and transaction costs. Finally, by promoting and supporting international trade, they themselves had access to valuable merchandise.

Venice, for its part, earned not only on the sale and shipping costs, but also on the capital that returned. When Venetian merchants decided to return at the end of their activity abroad, they had to pay a tax, which in the second half of the fourteenth century was 1%, on the total value of the assets they repatriated. Corradino de Vecchi, a Venetian merchant of Veronese origins, for example, communicated to the Venetian authorities in 1371 that he wanted to return to his homeland after three years spent in Tana, stating that he had left in 1367 with almost nothing ("quasi nihil secum portavit") looking for an income to support his wife and three children who remained in Venice. In the three years spent at the mouth of the Don, and thanks to the support of the Venetian authorities in those lands ("suffragio nobilium vestrorum quibus adhesit in

dictis partibus»), had built a rich trade between Tana and Saraj, to the point of accumulating a small fortune of 1,500 gold ducats. ⁶ Not everyone was so skilled or lucky. While it is true that many Venetian citizens became rich in Tana, others returned after years spent abroad with less ⁷ than they owned before leaving.

Imports

The typology of goods handled by Venetian merchants between Venice and Tana and between Venice and Trebizond includes categories that we could broadly divide into luxury goods and precious metals, raw materials, and widely consumed food products. Some of these products were also available in Europe, but the quantity could not meet the demand. For example, already during the 13th century the consumption of salt exceeded the production of the salt pans of Chioggia and Southern Italy, from which Venice obtained its supplies. The salt extracted in Crimea in the salt pans of the Kerch area was therefore one of the products **purchased** by the Venetian merchants operating in Tana.

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The demand for cotton also grew in the 1200s, becoming increasingly widespread as an alternative fabric to wool, and moleskins, mixed wool and cotton cloths, gradually acquired a significant position in European exports to the East. Alum, a mineral used as a mordant for dyes, was increasingly in demand for the dyeing industry. Cereals, which were never enough, were imported from Crimea: Caffa, Tana, Porto Pisano, Cembalo and other ports became increasingly important during the 14th century for the supply of wheat and less refined grains.

Wheat and all other Black Sea cereals were fundamental to the Venetian economy. They were usually transported on private ships, which could obtain supplies in the small ports of the Sea of Azov, closer to the production areas.

⁹ Private navigation is largely absent from public sources, but in Tana it often emerges in notarial documents relating to the grain trade, as when, on 28 April 1360, the Grava shipowner of the late Giorgio di Stanzi, originally from Smisso, ceded to I rented his ship, which was in the port of Tana, with its twenty-one sailors, to the Venetian Giovanni Bembo, who undertook to load 460 bushels of wheat which he had to take to Pera. The two contractors established that the Bembo and the crew could retain for themselves up to ¹⁰ On 22 May 1360 the Genoese shipowner Giovanni a maximum of 40 bushels. della Maddalena rented his ship to to transport them to Venice. Giovanni Bembo himself, who loaded 500 bushels of wheat on it

¹¹ The importance of wheat is

also attested by the fact that in the Venetian *Tarifa* it is expressly said that it did not and sometimes it could be exported without authorization (*without pardon*), used as ¹² did come collateral for the transport of precious metals, as in May 1360, when the Venetian merchant Michele Signolo entrusted a batch of raw silver for a total value of 250 hyperperes to Gaspare Soranzo di Corone, patron of a ship anchored in the port of Tana. For transport they gave Signolo 120 bushels of wheat as collateral. ¹³

The other symbolic good of international trade also arrived from the East: silk. The growth of the silk industry in thirteenth-century Italy increased the demand for raw fabric, and even in this case local and Mediterranean production was unable to keep pace, creating a demand that opened up space for imports, in particular from the Caspian region and from China.

In the Italian documentation of the 13th century there is no mention of Chinese silk until 1257, when in the Genoese notarial minutes the term of *silk captua* (with the variant of *catuxta* and *catuya*). ¹⁴ After the middle of the century, raw Chinese silk also appeared in Lucca, the capital of the Italian silk industry, imported mainly by Genoese merchants.

From the end of the 13th century, silk traveled from the Far East to the Caspian region. From here it reached Constantinople via two routes: Tana from the north and Tabriz from the south. In the fourteenth century silk became one of the most widespread products. Knowledge of different silks grew, to which names were given presumably linked to the production area, and Pegolotti cites fifteen types.

For example, *mercadasia* (or *shitcascia*) silk was a good quality fabric produced in Merv. ¹⁵ *Cannarua* silk, on the other hand, was produced in Karabagh (in the southern Caucasus). Most of the transactions speak of *Ghella silk*, most likely produced in Ghilan in Persia, on the southern coast of the Sea. In general, Chinese silk was of lower quality than finished ¹⁶ Caspian silk. produced in Central Asia. Merchants preferred to purchase raw or semi-silk, and therefore cheaper, to limit the losses that the long journey and exposure to the elements could cause and therefore during the decades of greatest traffic, between the second half of the 13th century and the 1940s. of the fourteenth century, profits on the Chinese silk trade were linked to quantity rather than quality.

¹⁷

Since the second half of the 13th century, the Venetians purchased fish in 18th century, Black Sea, especially sturgeons, whose fishing had already been active in Tana for some time. When William of Rubruck arrived in Soldaia in 1253, he noted that «to the east of that province [...] there is a city called Matrica [i.e. Matrega, south of the Kerch Strait] where the Tanai river enters into the Pontic Sea through a wide mouth

12 miles" and "the merchants who come from Constantinople and who reach the aforementioned city of Matrica, however, send their boats up to the Tanai River ¹⁹ Even when the Mongolian way to buy dried fish, especially sturgeon". of Central Asia was open and assiduously from distant markets such as China and India, in Tana local production remained ²⁰ frequented by merchants, in addition to products coming central to the region's exchange economy. the other since the first half of the fourteenth century, given the profitability of the trade of ²¹ Venetians and Genoese themselves became producers *on site*.

²⁰ Between

The ²² fish ²³ In the 14th century the Genoese were particularly active in the sturgeon trade, century these were joined by the Venetians, who purchased them in the ports of the Sea of Azov (Vosporo and Porto Pisano), as well as in Saraj.

²⁴ The fish did not always arrive in Venice, but was resold in the Black Sea ports: Caffa, Trebizond, Smisso, Constantinople and sometimes in the Aegean islands.

In Tana there were also other local agricultural products, such as hazelnuts and apples. ²⁵ Furthermore, products from the Russian ²⁶ and Baltic economies arrived, as well as meat preserved in honey. ²⁸ such as leather, and hunting are often found in contracts and wills. ²⁷ On a ship headed from Tana to Pera, in July 1360, 300 salted hides belonging to the Greek merchant Giovanni Fariamola were transported. ²⁹ On 26 August 1360 the "Saracen" merchant Coza Mansuth sold 870 ³⁰ salted leathers and 348 cowhides to Pietro Penzi for a total value of 220 sums. will drawn up on 18 September 1361 by Giovanni Testa, a Venetian merchant of Pistoia origins, we find, among other goods, rabbit skins worth 56

large ones destined for the Flemish markets. ³¹ Among the other imported products there was wax, requested in Europe especially for the manufacture of candles, which was obtained from tallow, of animal origin or from bees. Beeswax, much cleaner and more fragrant, was imported from the East and considered a luxury product, while tallow in blocks, although less valuable, remained the main product for the manufacture of candles, as sources confirm. ³² Spices were among the most traded products with the East. ³³ The Mongol Empire facilitated trade, but most of the spices arrived on the Indian routes,

reaching Persia and then Tabriz through the Strait of Hormuz. The most sought-after were pepper and ginger, which Italian merchants purchased from Muslim merchants, whose trade networks extended as far as southern China. ³⁴ From Tabriz the spices arrived in Europe via what we have defined as the southern route, whose first port of call was the port of Laiazzo. From here they were transported by land to Trebizond, and embarked for the Mediterranean ports. This very profitable flow remained constant

until the 1440s, when the political crisis and the collapse of the Ilkhanate forced Western merchants to abandon Tabriz and Persia.

The volume of spices exchanged in Tana was smaller. The anonymous author of the commercial manual known as *Nottario*, probably compiled between 1310 and 1320, clearly states that in Tana «spices both Pegolotti and the Venetian *Tarifa* dedicate every reason, but few». less and prices in Tana. However, it ³⁵ space for spices when they talk about weights, measures was not a one-way trade, as Venetian merchants exported saffron produced in Italy and in the Middle East, Syria and Egypt to the Golden Horde.

³⁶

Very important and profitable were pearls and precious stones. The author of the *Nottario* writes that «he came from the Tana to bring towards the west [...] oriental pearls of every reason» coming mainly from India and Tibet. ³⁷ — Precious stones also came to Tana from China via Central Asia. We have seen how they were important for those wishing to undertake a journey within the borders of the Mongol empire as they were light, but of great value.

Exports

Among the goods that the Italians exported to the eastern markets there were above all products from the textile industry and metals. The Venetians exported French linen cloths and woolen cloths throughout the Mongol Empire, as well as the latter was purchased by the Venetians ³⁸ cotton. — in the Middle East – the most valuable came from Acre and the kingdom of Lesser Armenia – and exported to Tana ,), or with the fiber cleaned from the Urgench, Almaligh, and Saraj shelled (*maputo* rest of ³⁹ the plant.

If it is true that silver traveled mainly from Europe to the East, it is equally true that there were cases in which Venetian merchants imported silver from Tana to transport it to Venice or to invest it in regional markets. ⁴⁰

⁴¹ However, the quantity of metals exported to the East was significant. All kinds were exported: iron, tin and copper, mainly used in the production of weapons. The tin came from mines in Devon and Cornwall. The Venetian galleys of Flanders loaded it in English ports to transport it to Venice, and then to the Levant.

⁴² From the early years of the fourteenth century, Venetian merchants also purchased German and Bohemian tin. ⁴³ — Sometimes brass also appears in documents. On 22 September 1360, Ser Marco di Filippo Venier went to the notary Benedetto Bianco in Tana to appoint Antonio Ariano as his attorney, who had to recover a credit that Venier had

against Zanachi Barbafella, also Venetian, for a batch of brass wire.

⁴⁴ Even more important was the trade of copper, used in the alloy for bronze, and therefore for coinage, furnishings and many other objects. Much of the copper came from German mines and was sold in Venice by Saxon and Bohemian merchants in the Fondaco dei Tedeschi. During the 14th century, Slovak copper extraction significantly increased. Finally, iron and lead were also exported. The sources present other cases of merchants engaged in the iron trade in Tana.

⁴⁵

Alongside cloth and metals, a leading place in exports was occupied by wine.

⁴⁶ Venetian merchants exported Greek wine, produced ⁴⁷ Wine was islands, and Italian, coming from the South. even beyond Tana, as ~~ex~~ exported to the Aegean shown in the will of the Genoese merchant Manuele Guarnieri who, in partnership with Zilio Dentado, sold it to Kabardi and Porto ⁴⁹ The Greek wine, which the merchants bought in the Pisan. Aegean and resold in Tana, cost up to 4 sums per barrel ⁵⁰ whereas the local wine, from Solgat, cost on average 2.25 sums per barrel. ⁵¹ Examples of wine trade abound and give us a concrete perspective of the myriad of transactions, both sales and testaments, that passed through notary offices. On 4 September 1359 the Venetian merchant Francesco di Segna, resident in Tana, went before the notary to settle a credit from Nicoletto de Toris of 7.5 sums ⁵². On 14 December of the same year a silver for 4 barrels of wine of Tropea. another Venetian merchant resident in Tana, Pietro Gatto, lent Ser Bortolano Cattelan de Bassi 3.5 sums of silver to purchase the same day, Gatto lent two sums of silver to ~~two~~ barrels of the same Calabrian wine. ⁵³ On Vittorio Fioravanti, also a Venetian merchant, for the purchase of a barrel of Tropea wine.

⁵⁴

In August 1362 in Tana, Bernardo Bonvesin dictated his will to the notary Benedetto Bianco. Among his possessions are two barrels of Tropea wine with a total value of 5 silver sums. Furthermore, Bonvesin arranged to pay a debt of 12 barricati that he had contracted with the Genoese merchant Ottobono Piccamiglio for the purchase of Greek wine. On 18 October 1362, the Genoese merchant Andreolo di Murta drew up his will in Tana, which mentions the company that Andreolo has with his brother Leone for the trade ⁵⁵ of Corone wine in Tana and Porto Pisano.

The will of the Genoese merchant Andalò Basso, resident in Tana, in particular shows how much he had enriched himself with the wine trade. Among his many possessions there was a warehouse, where his partner Niccolò Spinola lived, in which fifteen barrels of Greek wine were stored. Basso had a credit with the Venetian Tommaso di Bora of five sums of silver for the sale of wine

Greek. Other credits related to the wine trade include money from a certain Carlotta of Albenga for some Malvasia, 500 aspers barricaded by the tavern keeper Ianixio, and a sum of money from a certain Filippa, widow of Giorgio Stornello, for some Malvasia. ⁵⁶ In January 1360 the Venetian Pietro de Ognibene, resident in Tana, received a loan of 4.5 sums from the merchant Coza Machomuth of Solgat to purchase two barrels of local wine (*mostus de Solcati*).

⁵⁷

2. *The slave trade*

Throughout the second half of the fourteenth century, most of the goods requested in Europe, including foodstuffs, manufactures, and raw materials from the East, passed through Venice and other Italian cities. Despite the political crises within the Mongol khanates, which slowed down the movement of goods and people, and the conflicts with Genoa, Venice remained one of the main hubs in the commercial system that united the Mediterranean to the rest of Europe. The voyages of state-contracted market galleys continued without interruption, apart from the years of conflict. But even in the most difficult moments, Venetian merchants continued to do business on the Black Sea and to return even after political crises that temporarily forced them to leave. The object of this flow of goods was above all the slave trade, which had few stops during the fourteenth century. Slaves, more than any other type of commodity, constitute an indicator of the economic and financial performance of commercial relations between the Mongolian markets and the foreign merchants who frequented them.

Despite the many vicissitudes that the Venetian settlement of Tana underwent over the course of its almost two centuries of life, the slave trade remained one of the most lucrative trades. Merchants engaged in the sale of slaves did not always specialize in this type of trade. Some of them, however, only bought slaves and nothing else, others bought some of them together with other merchandise, and still others were completely unrelated to the trade.

The trafficking of people, from East to West, had flourished since the 10th century thanks to Russian merchants who had expanded their range of action from Central-Eastern Europe to the Byzantine Empire. Venetian merchants had already been participating in this activity since the 12th century, purchasing slaves in the Middle East and the Balkans, in Istria and Dalmatia, to resell them throughout the Mediterranean basin. The Mongol invasions directly affected the supply due to the many conflicts that swelled the ranks of enslaved people, in

generally captured in battle or during raids. The loss of individual freedom made these people liable to be bought and sold, and therefore they were considered like other commodities.

Corresponding with the greater availability of slaves, from the second half of the 13th century to the first half of the 15th century, the number of slaves purchased by Italian merchants also increased, albeit with arrests, declines and recoveries. In the beginning, starting from the first half of the fourteenth century, they were mainly Greeks, captured in war in the Aegean islands or children of destitute families. From the second half of the 13th century the main source became the Mongol empire, and in particular the eastern area of the Golden Horde, inhabited by nomads, to which the Venetian merchants settled in Tana had easy access. The Ilkhanate, however, remained excluded from the large flows of slaves, partly because access to captured or kidnapped people was more limited, but above all because the Persian Mongol state entered into crisis and ceased to exist in the middle of the 14th century, at the moment in which the slave trade increased in intensity.

The Mamluk Sultanate required male slaves for use in the army; in Italy the houses of the entrepreneurial⁵⁸ class needed servants for domestic tasks, the artisans required young apprentices, the countryside needed workers for the harvest. Added to these flows was the demand for servile labor from the largest cities of the Golden Horde. In fact, the quantity of slaves arriving in Italy was small compared to the overall traffic. The voyage of the liner galleys was long and dangerous. Transporting a load of slaves from Tana to Venice presented many unknowns: from illness, easily contracted while traveling, to death; from the danger of being attacked by pirates to the shipwreck of the ship. For this reason, the slaves who reached Venice were a minority compared to those who were sold on the intermediate markets.⁵⁹ The fact is that in the 14th century the slave trade from Mongolian markets to Europe reached levels never seen before. The reasons for this increase were many and among them we must consider regional —

conflicts, the growing demand for labor due to the demographic decline that occurred in Europe at least from the beginning of the century, and the catastrophic contraction due to the plague of 1348. It can be assumed therefore that the convergence between a greater availability of slaves in the areas under Mongol rule and a widespread need for workforce compensation, in particular the least specialized one, favored this market. of the population was made up of nomadic shepherds of Turkish origin, and farmers subservient to the Mongolian government or the Russian nobility. The state of poverty and the

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lack of political or legal protection made these populations fertile ground for slave traders, not only Italians, but also Armenians, Arabs, and Turks, as can be seen from the sales deeds stipulated before the Venetian notaries active in Tana. Trade extended from the Black Sea coast to the major cities of the Golden Horde such as Sarai and Astrakhan.

Those who did not directly participate in this traffic were the Mongolian ruling class, who rather limited themselves to regulating it, as the nobles at the head of the various [61](#) *tümen* were the administrative and legal authority that monitored the activities of foreign merchants, including the buying and selling of slaves. However, in the second half of the fourteenth century, documentation also attests to the presence of *Tatar merchants*, almost always as sellers. The slaves often came from the local population, who sold their family members out of poverty or choice.

[62](#) Cases in which children or grandchildren were sold for [63](#) were not uncommon. lack of means of support. Sometimes entire families ended up on the slave market, especially in periods of conflict and impoverishment. generalized. However, an entire household had low prices, probably because maintenance [64](#) costs were higher and the life expectancy of older members was lower. Among the slaves destined for foreign markets, the majority were made up of young males destined in all likelihood for the Mamluk army or for more demanding jobs.

Different was the case, also frequent, of families who left their children in the service of merchants so that they could learn the trade. It was not a definitive form of servitude, but an apprenticeship or journeymanhip, often medium or long term for which a small salary, food, accommodation, clothing and footwear was provided. [65](#) Usually it was Venetian families, or Italian families in general, who left their children with the merchants so that they could teach them the trade, but it also happened that it was families of local origin who used this form of [66](#) "transitional enslavement".

— The children were also sold to Venetian merchants [67](#) as collateral for a money loan until its liquidation.

Slaves were by their nature a particularly diversified "commodity", with prices varying based on age, sex, health conditions and other individual characteristics. The physical state was most often reported by notaries at the time of the transaction with the words "sana omnibus menbris et admorbida chaduco". Both males and females reached their maximum value around 16-20 years of age. In general, the average cost of a slave increased constantly from the 13th to the 14th century, with a significant drop starting from 1363, and then rising again after a few years. The reasons for this variation are not entirely clear. If it is true that precisely in these years the internal hostilities within the Golden Horde

and the Lithuanian expansionist policy to the detriment of the Russian principalities had created a wider availability of enslavable individuals, it is equally true that in 1363 a new wave of plague violently struck the Golden Horde, causing thousands of victims.

[68](#)

Children and teenagers were also trafficked, and up to the age of 12 they cost little, [69](#) In the in adolescence the price could even double. mid-14th century the number of ~~second~~ year while local merchants involved in the buying and selling of slaves also increased until it exceeded that of the Venetians, perhaps due to greater risks for those venturing as far as Saraj or Astrakhan in a period of serious political instability and increased conflict. Confirming less security, in the same months the sales of properties in Tana also intensified, as shown in the papers of the Venetian notary Nascimbene Scarena.

[70](#) From

the 1980s the affirmation of Toqtamish and the process of political stabilization that followed probably had tangible effects, if it is true that in the same period not only local movements became active again, but also those

long range and the prices of slaves began to rise again.

[71](#)

In any case, and despite the fluctuations that followed one another over the years, the prices of slaves remained high on average throughout the fourteenth century.

The most generous documentary series we have available concerns the Venetian notarial deeds drawn up in Tana in the second half of the 14th century. From a study of the minutes it appears that the majority of slaves in those years were women (74.78% of the total). Between 1359 and 1362 the female preponderance is very clear (an average of over 86%). In 1363, the year for which we have the most coherent and abundant series of data, the female-male ratio changes to the advantage of the latter, who pass to 30% of the total. One of the main reasons could be linked to the political events of that year, as we saw in the sixth chapter, and to the shortage of manpower caused by the violent plague epidemic that struck the Golden Horde.

The prevalence of females among the slaves exchanged in periods of political stability and in the absence of destabilizing factors was in all probability due to the fact that the slaves, in Italy as well as *locally*, were mostly destined for domestic tasks, and not military ones as instead happened in Mamluk sultanate. It was not uncommon for merchants to purchase slaves to use as servants in Tana, and subsequently take them to Italy.

[72](#) Some slaves became concubines

[73](#) of the merchants who resided in Tana, with whom they often had children. These relationships sometimes ended in the manumission of the slave and in Male and female slaves they could also merchants and officials [74](#) be married to the owner. "hired" for a fixed period of time by

75 residents in Tana. —

In the ratio between males and females the proportion changes towards the end of the century, and in the period 1381-1383 males constitute 57% of the total. Given that the data available to us for these years are decidedly scarcer compared to the previous period, the reasons for this trend reversal can be traced back to the increased conflict in the north-western region of Russia, which on the one hand increased the availability of males, on the other hand it made it more profitable to sell males destined for military activities. In general, in the 15th century the volume of slaves traded decreased, but females remained the majority (74%).

The average age of slaves is higher for females, with 14.87 years against 12.8 for males, as is the number of females at a young age, from 14 to 18 years. The ethnic origin of the slaves was varied but the majority appeared in the documents as "Tatars". Between 1359 and 1366, out of a total of 249 contracts examined, over 76% had as their object individuals of *the genus tartarorum*. The rest is divided between Circassians (23), Mongols (21), Alans (5) and 76 In the early fifteenth century, with the advance of the army a single Greek slave.

Timurid, the recruitment of Tatar slaves significantly decreased in both Genoa and Venice. 79 Tana.

77

78 The phenomenon also presents similar characteristics to

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In fourteenth-century Europe, Christians, or baptized people, could not be enslaved, and therefore the buying and selling of slaves was restricted to "pagans". In contracts drawn up by notaries in Tana, the slave was usually baptized immediately after purchase, indicating that the subject in question was no longer liable to be resold. Of the total slaves sold, 115 were baptized (49.14%). In Tana, as in Caffa, slaves generally remained for a short time, in transit to other markets unless they were destined to work in the homes of residents. 80

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Both in Tana and in Venice an enslaved person could buy his freedom 81 own work or obtain it upon the owner's death. the duration of Naturally not with his the bond of slavery always corresponded to the duration of the master's life. The testator could decide to leave his slaves at the service of his heirs for a period of time following his death.

82 There were cases in which the owner decided to free his slave without indicating the reasons, as in the case of the ex-consul of Tana Francesco Bragadin, who decided to take the young Antonina with him to Venice, freeing her from all constraints. 83

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Throughout the 14th century, slaves constituted a non-dominant but certainly significant percentage of the population of the Italian cities of

central-north, and the Tartar ones were the majority both in transactions *on site* and in the ports of arrival, as Petrarch also notes. ⁸⁴ In Venice and Genoa, at the end of the 14th century, about 10% of the total population was made up of people of non-free status. In Florence in 1372, out of 357 slaves, 274 were Tatars (77%).

⁸⁵ In the 1460s, numerous families were recorded in Venice as owners of Tatar slaves.

⁸⁶

Slave trading continued into the first half of the 15th century. ⁸⁷ However, the ethnic composition and origin of the slaves changed. In the early fifteenth century the recruitment of Tatar slaves significantly decreased in Tana, ⁹⁰ The incidence of sales remained high, but ⁸⁸ a trend ⁸⁹ and in Venice. Genoa fell significantly compared to the years 1359-1370, confirming that had already started at the end of the fourteenth century. In this period, Russian (*Ruthenian*) and Circassian slaves increased in Venice due to the internal conflicts of the Golden Horde, the Timurid wars and the increasingly frequent Mongol raids in the Russo-Lithuanian lands. ⁹¹ In the period 1359-1385 Tatars were the clear majority of slaves traded, over 90%, but in 1404-1408 — they dropped to 36.8%. In contrast, Russian ones rose from 1.2 to 5.7% and Circassian ones to 47.3%. Between 1413 and 1415 the Tatar slaves decreased to 5.5%, the Russian ones rose to 72.2% and the Circassian ones to 27.7%. Prices also changed, reflecting the greater or lesser availability of a certain type of slave. According to the Massaria register of ⁹² August 10 Caffa, in 1410 *the introitu Sancti Antonimi continued to be paid*. 1427 the Venetian Senate, as a ship was arriving from Tana with over 400 male and female slaves ("ultra numeros quadringentorum inter sclavas") and considering that sea conditions could worsen, authorized the *sclavos et* captain to go to Istria where the slaves could stay until the end of December. ⁹³ The slave trader in this period was generally a Venetian who had settled in Tana not long ago, but there was no shortage of cases of Muslim merchants, of probable In practice, the Saraj merchants were replaced by those of Central Asian origin. coming from Persia and Transoxiana (Urghench, Merv, Samarkand),—

probably favored years earlier by Tamerlane's advance.

⁹⁴

In conclusion, regarding the slave trade, we can say that where poverty and wars generated supply, the Genoese and Venetians produced demand. The establishment of the Mamluk state, the growth in the financial availability of families in Italy, the plague epidemics, were all factors that pushed up the demand for slaves compared to a wide availability in Asia. Throughout the fourteenth century, with sometimes abrupt fluctuations and variations linked above all to the conflicts between the Italian republics and the Mongols, the

Genoese and Venetian slave traders did business in human trafficking, especially in Tana. After a slowdown due to the Timurid attack, trade continued without ever really stopping completely. The origin of the slaves changed; a clear prevalence of Tatars was replaced by Ruthenian slaves, a clear majority of women led to a greater gender balance, but the slave trade in the Mongol empire, or in what remained of it, survived until the Ottomans, in 1475, put an end to the Venetian adventure in the East.

- [1.](#) Braudel, *Material Civilization*, p. 127; taken from Dini, *The circuits of international trade*, p. 635.
- [2.](#) Much in demand in the Levant, even a century later, was that of Crotone, cf. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 1, fasci. 3, ff. 15v-16r.
- [3.](#) Zibaldone from Canal, pp. 42-52.
- [4.](#) Dini, *The circuits of commerce*, p. 638.
- [5.](#) See for example the deeds of Lamberto di Sambuceto, who rogated to Caffa in 1290. In the many documents studied by GI Bratianu and then by M. Balard, among the goods purchased by Genoese merchants in Tana, mainly fish and furs appear. For a more recent summary see Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 247.
- [6.](#) Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXX, pp. 489-490.
- [7.](#) See for example Venice Senate. *Mixed deliberations*, XXXIII, pp. 193-194.
- [8.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 43r; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 14v.
- [9.](#) Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 253.
- [10.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 18r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 109, pp. 48-49. The cases mentioned in the documentation are numerous (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, ff. 18v, 19r, 39bis; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, nos. 113, 114, 115, 245, pp. 49-51 and 84).
- [11.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, f. 19r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 116, p. 51. The document specifies that the bushels are to be considered according to the weight of Constantinople and the freight price is set at one ducat and 18 larges per bushel. The wheat is actually loaded onto Giovanni della Maddalena's ship and the price is raised to 3.25 ducats per bushel to be paid within a month of the ship's arrival in Venice.
- [12.](#) *Tarifa*, ed. Orlandini, p. 21.
- [13.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 18v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 113, pp. 49-50.
- [14.](#) Lopez, *China Silk in Europe*, p. 73.
- [15.](#) Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 300; Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 726.
- [16.](#) Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 208 and 301; Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 726.
- [17.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 730. Lopez made some calculations and drew the conclusion that on the one hand Chinese silk actually cost less (about 30%) than that produced in Merv or Ghilan, on the other that due to the low quality of the product, the Chinese silk was rarely mentioned in documents where it was preferred to speak more generically of silk rather than catuya silk etc. See Lopez, *China Silk in Europe*, p. 75 and ASV, CI, Busta 19, reg. 3, ff. 9r-11v where, in September 1361, the Venetian merchant of Pistoia origins Giovanni Testa claims to own "silk cloths" worth 40 ducats destined for the Flanders market.
- [18.](#) Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 314.
- [19.](#) Guillelmus de Rubruc, *Itenerarium*, ed. Van De Wyngaert, I, 3, pp. 5-6. William of Rubruck, *Journey to Mongolia*, ed. Church, pp. 9-10.
- [20.](#) For example, on 1 December 1386 Vittore Gioioso, a Venetian, received from Giovanni di Arezzo, sescalco of the consul, 4 sums for two barrels of sturgeon which he would receive in the month of April 1387. As collateral, Vittore pledged his thirteen-year-old slave named Amore. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 17v; Pucci

Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 587, pp. 202.

[21.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 15v.

[22.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 2, fasci. 7, f. 16r; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 15v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 95, pp. 44-45.

[23.](#) Ballet, *The Fish Trade*, pp. 390-407; Balard, *La Romania génoise*, pp. 706-707. In the deeds of the Genoese notary Lamberto di Sambuceto, drawn up in Caffa between 1289 and 1290, there are eight charter agreements to go to La Copa to load fish. See Bratianu, *Actes des notaires*, pp. 262-291.

[24.](#) Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 316. These locations, mentioned in detail in the trading manual discovered and published in part by Bautier in 1970, do not appear in Pegolotti's text. It is an interesting fact since both texts come from a Florentine environment but Pegolotti's is in all likelihood a few years later. It is not clear whether or not in the years in which the merchant serving the Bardi bank writes, the Venetians were authorized to trade in the peripheral ports of the Sea of Azov.

[25.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, f. 3r-v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 272, p.

ninety two.

[26.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 9r-11v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 278, pp. 96-98; ASV, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/b, f. 1v.

[27.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 9r-11v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 278, pp. 96-98.

[28.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 189, n. 5, doc. of 24 April 1380, notary Vittore Scalipiero; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 486, p. 176.

[29.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 28r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 161, p. 63.

[30.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 34r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 200, p. 73.

[31.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 9r-11v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 278, pp. 96-98.

[32.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 15r; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 16r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 90, p. 43; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 314; Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24. On 11 April 1360 Rizzardo and Antonino di Riva, two Genoese brothers, sold wax to Giacomo Giuntini and Giuliano di Grazia worth 30 sums at the price of 2 sums and 14 essays per cantaro (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 1, f. 17v; In the will drawn up in Tana on 14 May 1384, the Venetian merchant Primasio di Ragusa orders that the wax and fish he owned be sold as his trustees see fit (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file 7/B, f. 19v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 488, p. On 2 July 1385 Dalmazio Bocca, a Genoese merchant, sold 26 wax *cantari* to the Venetian Ettore Bembo «according to the weight of Tana» at the price of 47 bezants per cantaro. As a guarantee, Bembo pledges 50 bushels of fodder which he owns in a warehouse (*fovea*) in the Venetian district of Tana (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file.

7/B, f. 16r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 557, pp. 196).

[33.](#) Freedman, *Out of the East*.

[34.](#) See especially the fourth chapter in Chaffee, *The Muslim Merchants*.

[35.](#) Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 314.

[36.](#) Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 162-163; Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 314.

[37.](#) Ibid., p. 314.

[38.](#) ASV, CI, envelope 19, reg. 3, ff. 5v-6v; f. 9r-11v; 23v-24r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 275, p. 94; n. 278, pp. 96-98, and *inventory of the assets of the late Andalò Basso*, pp. 105-106.

[39.](#) Pegolotti often cites it as the preferable one to market both for its higher value and for the smaller bulk that clean cotton took up on the galleys. Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 24, 63, 77; Bautier, *Les relations économiques*, p. 314.

[40.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, f. 20r, 28r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 119, 160, 161 pp. 52, 63.

[41.](#) On 21 May 1360, the Venetian merchant Antonio Venier sold a lot of silver to the company of Giovanni Grifoni for a total value of 377 hyperperis (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, f. 19r; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, no. 114, p. On 23 November 1362 the Genoese merchant Andalò Basso, resident in Tana, mentions fifty silver bars in his will (ASV, CI, Busta 19, reg. 3, f. 20r-23r.); In September 1363 the Venetian merchant Ser Marco Rosso received silver worth 250 ducats from Ser Matteo de Prato, also a Venetian from Giudecca, both resident in Tana, to be paid when the Romanian galleys, which were now *ad flumine Tane*, will have returned to Venice (ASV, CI, Busta 19, reg. 3, ff. 20r-23r).

[42.](#) Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, pp. 159-160; Blanchard, *Mining*, pp. 667-668; see also Hatcher, *English Tin Production*.

[43.](#) See for example Lupprian, *Il Fondaco dei Tedeschi*.

[44.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, f. 39r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 239, p. 83.

[45.](#) In the deed cited above it appears that Zanachi Barbafella had also purchased iron clubs from Filippo Venier, in addition to the brass wire. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, f. 8v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 59, p. 34.

[46.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, file. 1, f. 39bis; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 245, p. 84.

[47.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 2, f. 17v, 23r; reg. 3 ff. 2r-v, 3r-v, 5v-6v, 12r-13r, 20r-23r; loose parchments, doc. of 23 September 1263; envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 14v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 106, p. 48.

[48.](#) Between 1359 and 1360 the Tropea wine that Venetian merchants exported to the Black Sea sold for an average of 1.6 somi per barrel, while two years later the Greek wine sold for 5 somi per barrel (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 7, folder 12r-13r, and 20r-23r; 105. Wine was also bought in Trebizond, which in 1362 was sold in Tana at 14 aspers per miter (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasc. 3, f. 18r-19r; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines of the West*, n. 284, p. 102).

[49.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 15v-16r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 282, pp. 100-101.

[50.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, ff. 25v-26r and 26r, 12r-13r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 152 and 153, p. 61.

[51.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, ff. 2r, 9r, 13v, 14r, 15r, 17v, 23r and 23v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 7, 64, 83, 84, 86, 91, 106, 136, 139.

[52.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 2r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 7, p. 22; Pegolotti, *The practice of trading*, p. 39, 136 and 189.

[53.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 13r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 82, pp. 40-41.

[54.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 13v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 84, p. 41.

[55.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 16v-17v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 283, pp. 101-102.

[56.](#) Many other cases emerge from the documentation. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 16r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 96, 97, 98, p. 45.

[57.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 14v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 91, p. 43.

[58.](#) In a treaty signed by three in 1263, Michael VIII Palaeologus had granted the Mamluk sultan Baybars, with the approval of the khan of the Golden Horde Berke, the passage of the straits to ships transporting slaves from the Black Sea to Egypt. Barker, *Egyptian and Italian Merchants*, pp. 166-167; Karpov, *Istorija Tany*, p. 252.

[59.](#) Among them, one of the most active throughout the fourteenth century was Crete. See Quirini Popjawaska, *The Venetian involvement*, p. 276 and n. 78.

[60.](#) Balard noted that in the two years immediately following the outbreak of the plague pandemic there was a temporary increase in male slaves sent from Crimea to Genoa. Balard, *Salvage in the Latin Mediterranean*, p. 242; Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, especially the chapter. 3 (epub:

118 et seq.).

61. The *tümen* is a unit of ten thousand soldiers, which however also represents an administrative and territorial district under the jurisdiction of Mongolian governors. This unit was divided into smaller units called thousands and hundreds, also based on the decimal system used in the Mongolian army. Local sellers and buyers appear in the documents who come from *the Thazich centenary* (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, reg. 7, folder 1, f. 17r; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, n. 103, p. 47), or a Circassian slave originally from the *milliary Achboga* (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, reg. 7, folder 1, f. 22v; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, n. 131, p. 55), or again, a Mongol of the *Milliario Melichbey* (ASV, CI, Notai, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasc. 1, f. 25r; Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, n. 147, p. 59). The decimal districts that appear in notarial sources appear to bear the name of the Mongolian noyon who was in charge of them.

62. For us who live in the third millennium, poverty is the most obvious and acceptable reason why a family could deprive itself of a child, but the truth is that the sources say nothing about the *objective* prospect of enslavement. That of the merchants is clear, but that of *the object* of the sale is completely obscure. All the documents we possess, many and full of information, are sales contracts and wills. In the first case, the age, sex, price and state of health of the slave are reported; in the second, the generosity of the master who, about to surrender his soul to God, frees his male or female slave.

63. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, file. 7, reg. 2, ff. 12v, 17r, 23r, 23v and reg. 4, f. 36r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, nos. 79, 103, 135, 138, pp. 39-40, 47 and 56. It is not uncommon to find Russian or Mongolian families in the documentation needing to sell children. Even in this case, most of the time it is women left alone who turn to the notary, as in the case of Donna Ocholino, widow of Dmitrij, who sells a 15-year-old daughter to the Venetian merchant Bertolino Magnamosto (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, fasc. 7, reg. 1, f. 21v; In the document just cited (f. 23r) there is an interesting wording when the Mongolian Apanas sells a thirteen-year-old sister to the Venetian merchant Marco Contarini who, writes the notary, is present and consenting at the moment of signing the deed.

64. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 4, f. 4v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 309, p. 114. This is an entire family made up of a father, mother, and a six-year-old son sold for a total sum of 115 aspers. Consider that a slave of that age could cost as much as 700 aspers.

65. If the family could afford it, they chose the length of service and paid a pre-established sum to the merchant for each year that the son spent in the shop. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 15r, 15v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 528, pp. 189-190 and 543, p. 193.

66. As in the case of the Mongols Cozichar and his brother Ianbas, who gave their relative to Giovanni Besagna as a boy for seven years in exchange for 10 sums of silver (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 15v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 546, p. 193).

67. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 4, f. 23v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 141, pp. 57-58.

68. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague*, p. 15. See also Shamiloglu, *The Impact of the Black Death*, pp. 325-343.

69. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 4, ff. 4v, 6r and 6v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 308, 314 and 316, pp. 113, 115 and 116.

70. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 181, file. 5, ff. 67r-v, 67v, 68v, 69r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 456, pp. 161-162, n. 457, p. 162, n. 465, p. 164 and n. 471, p. 165. We find certain news of merchants active in Saraj since 1371, when Corradino de' Vecchi, who operated between Tana, Urgench and Saraj, received authorization to bring all his possessions worth 1,500 ducats back to Venice (*Venice Senate. Mixed deliberations*, XXX, pp. 489-490). In 1378 a dispute between Niccolò Arpino and Marco Nani, over an unpaid shipment of honey, ended before the consul of Tana Donato Moro in April 1380. The two merchants declared that they had concluded the deal in Saraj in January 1378 (ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 189, n. 5; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 486. Doc. of 24 April 1380, notary Vittore Scalpiero).

71. The caravan route to Astrachan was certainly open when the merchant Primasio of Ragusa dictated his will to the notary Niccolò Natale in Tana and asked his associates to bring a load of carobs to sell in *Aziterchan*. Solgat is also mentioned in the will, where Primasio declares he has a credit of 15 bezants. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 1v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 488, pp. 179-

180. In March 1384 the Venetian merchant Giovanni Servodio was declared *habitor in Aziterchan*. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 13v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 505, pp. 184-185.

[72.](#) ASV, Notarial, Testaments 361, reg. 1, f. 129r; reg. 3, f. 2r-v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 1, pp. 19-20. In his will, drawn up at the mouth of the Don on 7 August 1359, Brandaia di Simone of Florence freed three slaves, one female and two males, who lived with him in Tana, while another slave named Elena was sent to Venice with children.

[73.](#) The topic has been studied in depth by Origo, *The domestic enemy*; see also Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times*, pp. 105-107.

[74.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 6v-7v, 12r-13r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 276, pp. 94-95 and n. 279, pp. 98-99; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 17v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 581, p. 201. It happened that it was the owner himself who wanted to marry his slave. Also in this case he had to go before the notary and officially register the tampering, as Francesco Bragadin, consul of Tana in 1385, did with his slave Antonina. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/b, f. 18r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 589, p. 203.

[75.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, file. 7, reg. 1, f. 12r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 78, p. 39. In October 1359 Giovanni Bembo, advisor to the Venetian consul in Tana, rented a young girl (of whom the notary does not provide her age or origin) from two Alan merchants for a year at the price of 300 aspers, almost half of average selling price.

[76.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 1, f. 5v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 39, p. 30.

[77.](#) Gioffrè, *The slave market*, p. 15 and 58; if in the twenty years 1400-1424 in Genoa there were 105 Tatar slaves (41.5%), in the twenty years 1425-1449 they decreased to 57 (just over 19%). The Russians go from 51 (20%) to 123 (41.6%).

[78.](#) Verlinden, *Le recrutement des esclaves*, p. 126.

[79.](#) Prokofieva, *Akty*; De Colli, *Moretto Bon*; ASV, Prosecutors of S. Marco, Misti, commissioners, envelopes 11, 64, 79, 94 and 147/a.

[80.](#) Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, p. 292; Bratianu, *Research on commerce*, p. 229. Bratianu, refers to the situation in force at the end of the thirteenth century, but these characteristics can also be extended to the following century, keeping in mind that precisely in the second half of the fourteenth century the Levant slave trade reached its highest peak; Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, vol. II.

[81.](#) Most of the time, testators do not limit themselves to freeing their slaves from all bonds of servitude, but also leave them small sums so that they can build an independent future for themselves. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 2r-v, 6v-7v, 7v-8v, 18r-19r, ff. 25r-26r; therein, fasci. 7, loose parchments, doc. of 23 September 1361 (Pucci Donati, *Ai confines dell'Ovest*, n. 413, pp. 140-141); ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 20, paper 361; ASV, Notarile Testamenti, 924, doc. of 29 November 1364; ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 1v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 488, pp. 179-181.

[82.](#) ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 130, file. 7/B, f. 13v; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 509, p. 185. The document is particularly interesting because upon his death the testator had arranged for his slave, a young "Saracen", to remain in the service of his widowed wife for three years. However, at her express request, the girl was immediately tampered with after paying a ransom of 400 aspers. ASV, CI, Notaries, envelope 19, reg. 7, fasci. 3, ff. 25r-26r (Pucci Donati, *Ai confine dell'Ovest*, n. 286, pp. 106-107) where the Venetian merchant Benedetto di Romagna dictates his will to the notary Benedetto Bianco and orders that one of his slaves remains with his wife for the six months after her death, then be released and get married.

In addition to the emancipation, our Benedict leaves the slave 1,000 silver aspers as a dowry.

[83.](#) Notarial deed of 3 July 1386 ASV, CI, Notaries, Busta 130, fasc. 7/B, f. 18r; Pucci Donati, *At the borders of the West*, n. 590, p. 203.

[84.](#) Karpov, *Istoriya Tany*, p. 252 and note 49.

[85.](#) Among others there are 30 Greeks, 13 Russians, 8 Turks and 4 Circassians (Origo, *The domestic enemy*, p. 336); Gioffrè, *The slave market*, p. 14. It is therefore no coincidence that a Florentine, Domenico di Benci, was the most active seller of slaves at the Tana between 159 and 1362. Even in Genoa the majority of slaves imported in the 14th century were Tatars (Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, pp. 794 and 799). Balard calculated that 64% of the slaves in Genoa were of *the genus tartarorum*; think that after the Tatars the ethnicity

the Circassians are more represented with just 7.1%.

[86.](#) For Venice there is no systematic study of the documentation relating to the 14th-15th centuries other than the now ancient one by Lazzari (*On traffic and conditions*). The section dedicated to the topic by Verlinden remains fundamental (*L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, vol. II, pp. 550-710). For Genoa, in addition to the aforementioned study by Gioffrè, see that relating to the fourteenth century by Balard, *La Romanie génoise*, pp. 785-833. More recent is the article Querini Popjawaska (*The Venetian Involvement*, pp. 255-298); see also Barker, *That most precious merchandise*, in particular chap. 5; ASV, Prosecutors of S. Marco, Misti, commissioners, envelope 123, 128, 144, 147, 150 and 166.

[87.](#) Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* pp. 955-963 and Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, chap. 5.

[88.](#) Prokofieva, *Akty*,; De Colli, *Moretto Bon*; ASV, Prosecutors of S. Marco, Misti, commissioners, envelopes 11, 64, 79, 94 and 147/a.

[89.](#) Gioffrè, *The slave market*, pp. 15 and 58; if in the twenty years 1400-1424 in Genoa there were 105 Tatar slaves (41.5%), in the twenty years 1425-1449 they decreased to 57 (just over 19%). The Russians go from 51 (20%) to 123 (41.6%).

[90.](#) Verlinden, *Le recrutement des esclaves*, p. 126.

[91.](#) Querini Poplawska, *The Venetian Involvement*, pp. 284-285.

[92.](#) Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, p. 953.

[93.](#) «Que dictos sclavos et sclavas conduci facient Venetias usque per totum mensem decembris proximus»: ASV, SM, LVI, f. 120.

[94.](#) De Colli, *Moretto Bon*, nos. 25, 31 and 32; Prokofieva, *Akty*, n. 69, p. 85.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the 14th century, the *Cumanic Codex*, *La Pratica della Mercatura* by Francesco Balduccio Pegolotti and *Il Milione* by Marco Polo demonstrate the existence of a now mature and articulated literature, from the travel vademecum to the instructions for merchants to personal memoirs, which circulated among Italian merchants and attests to their frequenting of places unknown or inaccessible to previous generations. The East, no longer shrouded in mythologies and apocalyptic visions, had become more legible and visible than it had ever been.

Notarial deeds and wills have left us a long trail of names and stories, often contained in a few lines, of people who from Venice had contributed to opening the sea and land routes, traveling along the stages, staying in transit cities, making agreements and making business. We cannot know with certainty what and how many fortunes were formed in these distant places, but there is no doubt that for about two centuries Venice defended with stubborn determination the right of its citizens to access the markets of the Mongol empire. The enemy was not the Mongols, but their commercial rivals, first and foremost Genoa, and in this unexpected conjuncture of Asian openings and European potential one of the most significant episodes of world history of the 13th and 14th centuries took place: the creation of a circuit global trade based on Mongolian political power and the mercantile capabilities of the Mediterranean maritime republics.

In the previous pages we have outlined in broad terms the various phases of a process that has sometimes been characterized, in historical literature, as the "expansion" of medieval Europe.

¹ Viewed from a broader perspective, the broadening of Europe's horizons and the expansion of its trade networks was the result of the integration of various regional systems that followed the political earthquake posed by the Mongol conquest.

² Although there is no doubt that the Mongol Empire opened the door to foreign merchants and facilitated trade and communication, its decisive role has only recently been appreciated,

thanks to studies that demonstrated the active participation of Mongolian rulers, merchants and intermediaries in the expansion of trade. ³ Mongolian

commercial culture, with its partnership institutions, logistical support, guarantees of compensation, and tariff and legal regimes favorable to merchants of all backgrounds and religions, was the main driver that allowed the many cultures within the empire to amalgamate and interact. It was in this context that the Latin merchants found reliable and interested interlocutors in those same "Tatars" whose conquests had thrown Europe into panic only a few decades earlier.

The system that was created was neither entirely stable nor free of conflicts, and might even seem ephemeral, but dwelling on its duration or judging its effectiveness on the basis of imperfect mechanisms would be reductive and anachronistic.

Leaving aside the many new knowledge acquired, the needs created by the integration of multiple commercial circuits were primary growth factors of the productive apparatus, investments, forms of exchange, and means of communication. The Genoese and Venetian bases on the Black Sea have long been recognized as connecting links between hitherto poorly integrated economic areas: the northern Mediterranean, which branched out to the fairs of Flanders, the southern Mediterranean, which from northern Africa it reached India and the Persian Gulf, and the eastern routes including Central Asia and China. This principle of globalization was unprecedented in history and the opportunities it presented opened up before Europeans almost suddenly. Venice, always looking for new landing places, could not fail to take up the challenge.

But it must not be forgotten that the construction of an integrated, secure trading world, stretching from China to Persia to Europe, characterized by the free movement of goods and people, was first and foremost a Mongolian dream, even if it was soon embraced with enthusiasm by those Mediterranean powers that had made trade the main reason for their very existence and success. The most fascinating aspect of this period is not so much what was achieved, but perhaps even more what was thought could be achieved, and the efforts that both individuals and states employed in attempting to forge new forms of exchange and communication. Undoubtedly the main obstacle was the internal divisions within Latinity, which often prevented coexistence within the spaces that were gradually being built. Mongol political fragility was also an important factor which, starting from the collapse of the Ilkhanate, reduced the possibilities of

success.

Venice was a leading protagonist in the construction of new ties and

in opening new routes, but it did so differently from others, and especially different from its great rival, Genoa. The specificity of Venice is felt in its statist control, in the meticulous organization of its consular representations, in resolving disagreements through diplomatic rather than military solutions, and in its ability to conduct negotiations. The relative rigidity of the Venetian system did not tolerate the development of forms of autonomy, and for this reason a constantly rotating consular presence was maintained in Tana and elsewhere until the end. The motherland was never absent, and the Venetians could count on the protection of the state even in difficult moments, such as those that followed the destruction brought by Tamerlane. But this only applied to bases on the Black Sea. Individuals who wanted to try their luck on longer voyages were less protected. As long as the Mongol empire continued to function, i.e. until the second half of the fourteenth century, the treaties guaranteed the restitution or reimbursement of valuables and goods that had been lost, where the Mongol authority was recognized. By Mongol authority we mean firstly the khans of the Golden Horde, with whom Venice maintained fairly continuous diplomatic relations, and secondly the Ilkhanate, which also had guaranteed various protections to the Latins. But there were no direct diplomatic approaches either with the Mongol emperors of China or with the rulers of the Chagadai Khanate. Although Qubilai himself and his successors had invited Western delegations on several occasions - the Polos themselves presented themselves as emissaries of the pope at the request of the khan - the Venetian state did not, in fact, go beyond defending access to the Sea Black as the pinnacle of Asian trade and a point of connection with the trading system of the Mediterranean area.

If the interests of Venice as a state and of the Venetian merchant as an individual roughly coincided and depended on each other in the squares between the Aegean and Tana, this was no longer the case when the merchant entered Mongolian territory, and the possible protection guaranteed by the treaties was reduced in proportion to the distance that separated them from the consular offices. In these territories it was the individual relationships between merchants and Mongols that guaranteed security and logistical support. The influx of Western goods and money into Asian markets was desired no less than the ability to find buyers for one's goods. And it was this communion of interests that allowed cultural, linguistic and religious obstacles to be overcome. In this the Mongols were no less innovative than the Italian merchants: their empire needed, to function as such, not only safe roads, but means of organizing exchange that were standardized through very different fiscal and monetary systems. The measures adopted in China, with the introduction of paper money and calculation methods valid throughout almost the entire territory, were undoubtedly the most coherent effort in

this sense, but the divisions between the various khanates and the development of local resistance prevented its expansion. The attempt to build a unified trading system was, however, in itself sufficient to attract merchants. Despite the many difficulties, access to local markets and the circulation of information contained in treatises on commercial practices allowed merchants to orient themselves and operate in territories where they enjoyed protection.

As has been noted by many scholars, the climate of political instability within the Tatar world, starting from the 1360s, interrupted the flow of trade on the great intercontinental arteries, but undoubtedly, as we have tried to demonstrate, the end of the so-called *pax mongolica* should not be read as a process of slow and inexorable decline of the Venetian presence in the "extreme Mediterranean" of the Black Sea. The key to understanding that we have proposed is another: it was the ability to adapt to an ever-changing situation evolution, on which events and developments linked to internal struggles within Christianity as well as to international situations of enormous complexity weighed heavily, to ensure that the Venetians continued to operate on the Black Sea and trade with "Tartars" and other Central Asian merchants well beyond the dissolution of the Mongol empire. The presence of individuals on routes to China or India was ultimately relatively inconsequential in the overall scheme of the Republic's strategic objectives. Venice, as we have said, had never been interested in establishing official relations with remote courts, and therefore the ability to reach distant markets was due solely to the resourcefulness of the merchants and the protection they managed to obtain from local rulers. The relationship between risk and profit, on long-distance routes, belonged to the calculation of the private investor, while the state aimed to guarantee free access, favorable fares, and protection where it managed to establish and sustain an official presence. And in this Venice spared neither people nor money.

Genoa, compared to Venice, had two advantages. On the one hand, it had maintained a dominant position on the Black Sea in terms of trade volume, demographic presence, strengthening of military defenses, and entrenchment in certain particularly profitable commercial sectors, such as the slave trade. On the other hand, the Caffioti and the other Genoese residents in the Pontic colonies were politically and economically more independent from their homeland than the Venetians, and were therefore organized as a local power that was at least semi-autonomous. Internal struggles and foreign domination, characteristic of late medieval Genoese history, made the Genoese overseas settlements self-governed communities dependent on the local economy and government, centered in Caffa, but with a network that extended across the entire Black Sea and could count on the robust community of Pera. Relations with the motherland of course not

they were never severed, but the trend was always towards greater autonomy.

Neither Genoese nor Venetians, obviously, moved in a cultural or political vacuum. Both had to deal with a variety of ethnic groups, religions and multiple communities (Greek, Tatar, Armenian, Jewish, Islamic and others) more or less active and consolidated in the places where they had landed, first as occasional merchants and travellers, and then as residents and investors integrated into the socioeconomic fabric. The growth of the Italian communities as a political and military force generated tensions with the local populations and rulers, exacerbated by the pre-existing rivalries between Genoa and Venice which not only did not subside in areas where both were relatively isolated, but were exacerbated, moving to the Sea Black pre-existing struggles and challenges. The relationship with the Mongol authorities was, in a certain sense, another front of the rivalry between the two cities, and this shows who the real masters of the situation were. Genoese supremacy was broken by Venice thanks to intense diplomatic activity aimed at obtaining privileges from the khan of the Golden Horde. The concession of a building plot in Tana became the key to access not so much to the Black Sea, but to a direct and continuous relationship with the khan, which would have established the legal, commercial, juridical and territorial terms of the Venetian presence, on which then capitalize by expanding the scope of its interests both locally and internationally.

If carving out a space in which to operate legally under the protection of the khan was the key to accessing markets - and cultivating relations between states was always the foundation of Venetian strategy - the difficulties were enormous. Let's first imagine what the communication problems could have been. Interpreters and translators were paid their weight in gold, precisely because they were indispensable to avoid misunderstandings whose consequences were unpredictable. The Mongolian authorities, moreover, did not compromise on their governing prerogatives and, as we have seen, real transgressions, or simply perceived as such, were often the subject of collective punishment.

The lack of distinction, in the eyes of the Mongols, between the various Latins, Franks and Christians, placed the Venetians in a condition of constant uncertainty, as they could be involved in sanctions imposed on the entire "Latinity" for actions outside their own check. The slave trade, in which many Christians were sadly active, provoked the reaction of Toqta Khan, who could not tolerate other Mongols being the object of buying and selling, a reaction that affected all the Latins without however stopping this trade. It is somewhat

ironic that the greatest crisis suffered by the Venetians within the Golden Horde was due to a transgression caused by an individual who, with his criminal action, threw the Latin community into panic, caused enormous material damage, as well as a protracted war that probably

it even had the unexpected and indirect consequence of the plague epidemic which spread throughout Europe from 1348. Reflecting on the relationship between collective interest and individual interest, it seems strange that the Venetian community decided to favor the second over the first. Subtracting one of your own members from the Mongol justice system at the risk of losing everything that the merchants possessed appears completely antithetical to the behavioral norms of the Venetian authorities, who often had to resort to the Mongol authorities to obtain protection against the Genoese. In this episode we can sense Venice's difficulty in fully relating to the Mongolian legal system. One can also imagine that in an isolated outpost like Tana the control of the governing bodies was poor, while the Venetian nobles could count on a support network that allowed them to evade justice. All the Venetian Senate managed to do, in the end, was to ban the culprit from access to the Black Sea for the rest of his life. This sanction, certainly not proportional to the damage caused, the loss of human lives, and the prolonged interruption of trade, demonstrates how the Venetian state, although present in Tana with consuls, councils, administrators and a local militia, was very limited in its functions, which probably did not go beyond local community "service" responsibilities, especially when it came to recovering lost goods or negotiating commercial tariffs, and did not extend to police and public order tasks.

These limitations became even more palpable in Timur's period of political ascendancy and its aftermath. If the internal wars of the Golden Horde weakened its institutions and political structures, Venice, which had relied on the solidity of those institutions for its defense and protection, also emerged weakened. It has been more or less since the 1380s that the histories of Genoa and Venice in Gazaria have increasingly diverged, proceeding in opposite and specular ways. If the weakness of the Genoese government in the homeland is counterbalanced by an autonomist push from the Pontic colonies, the solidity of Venice, perceptible in expansion programs both on the mainland and in the Mediterranean, is counterbalanced by a path of entrenchment and progressive contraction of activities and investments Venetians in Tana. For Venice, Pontus is only one of the theaters of its political and commercial strategy, and therefore the investments are included in a global vision that had favored the Black Sea in an initial phase - essentially from the Treaty of Nymphaeum (1261) until the death of Berdibeg (1359) – but it had progressively lost importance in the following decades, due not only to the Ottoman rise and Tatar hostility, but also to the renewed friendly relations with the Mamluks, who reopened the Egyptian markets in Venice. Funds for the defense of Tana became more and more

inadequate and, apart from those companies rooted in the area, the community suffered a demographic contraction, a decline in business volume and a decline in investments. The population became more transient and commercial traffic increasingly entrusted to local agents.

It is therefore the peculiarity of the mercantile diaspora, the quality in relations with the motherland, the ability to manage relations with the authorities and local populations, which make the Italian presence in the Mongol empire a much less homogeneous phenomenon than it is usually perceived. If differences between Genoa and Venice have been highlighted by many scholars, their consequences on the nature of the relationship between merchant and state and between state and colony can be appreciated especially in the face of the crisis of the Mongol empire. Therefore, the progressive decline in the weight of Venice in Romania, especially in the fifteenth century, cannot be interpreted as a crisis of the Venetian commercial system, nor as an exclusive consequence of the end of the *Pax Mongolica*. To the same extent, the solidity of the Genoese presence in Gazaria will not protect the Ligurian city from its progressive decline.

The creation of the Mongol empire gave immense opportunities to the most advanced sectors of the European mercantile economy of the thirteenth century. And it was about "equal opportunities" as the Mongols did not discriminate between the various subjects, whether they were Latins or Saracens, Christians or Muslims or of any other type or origin. They probably did not discriminate as it was almost impossible for them to orient themselves in the political dynamics of Europe and the Middle East. But this cannot be thought to reflect negligence or ignorance. The Mongols were consistent in organizing a transcontinental trade network that united Asia and Europe, despite internal divisions, into a single integrated system.

The attempt was very ambitious, and would not be realized until centuries later, thanks to the discovery of sea routes that linked the oceans. Venice placed itself at the center and at the service of this great project, with its strengths, its objectives and its interests. The wishes of those who accepted the risks were partly realized and partly not, but the protagonists of that experience were aware of participating in a global and cosmopolitan enterprise, which led them to meet and form friendships with people of every race, to learn new languages and appreciate their customs and partly to question their own. During his residence in Tana, the Venetian noble Giosafat Barbaro hosted a "Tatar" ambassador who was returning from Cathay in 1436, hoping to be able to purchase jewels from him. In the conversation he learned that the "Lord of China" had knowledge of the Franks, and Barbaro was surprised by this. It was now clear that the Chinese and Tartars had control not only of the routes and markets but

also knowledge. The Venetians, at the twilight of their adventure on the extreme frontiers of Europe, were left with walls and towers to shelter behind, when all that remained of the Mongol empire was a distant memory. The next page in the history of globalization would be written by other empires, but only on the basis of knowledge, values and experiences that had linked the fate of the Venetians and other Italian merchants to the Mongols, conquerors of the world.

1. Philips, *The Medieval Expansion*.
2. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.
3. Allsen, *Commodities and Exchange*.

Appendix

1. Navigation

Table 1. Romània galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1330-1349 (in large lire)

Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1332-33	20	77,10	1542,5
1336-39	27	76,70	2072,4
1340-44	14	74,67	1175,5
1345-49	15	77,40	1161,5

Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 371

Table 2. Romània galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1350-1369 (in large lire)

Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1350	5	61,7	308,5
1351-54	Guerra degli Stretti, la navigazione è interrotta		
1355-59	14	110,7	1549,2
1360-64	21	52,3	1098,2
1365-69	22	48,5	1067,3

Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 372

Table 3. Number of Roman galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1370-1389 (in large lire)

Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1370-74	17	33,5	570
1375-77	7	27,7	138
1378-81	Guerra di Chioggia, la navigazione è interrotta		
1383-86	13	149,3	746,7
1387-89	4	80,3	321,2

Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 373

Table 4. Number of Roman galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1390-1409

Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1390-94	15	296,40	1482,20
1395-99	9	149,96	749,80
1403-07	10	183,80	918,90
1407-09	4	41,70	208,23

Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 374

Table 5. Number of Roman galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1410-1429

Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1410-14	12	230,6	1152,80
1415-19	12	39,2	469,90
1420-24	15	79,8	1196,25
1425-29	15	30,5	458,20

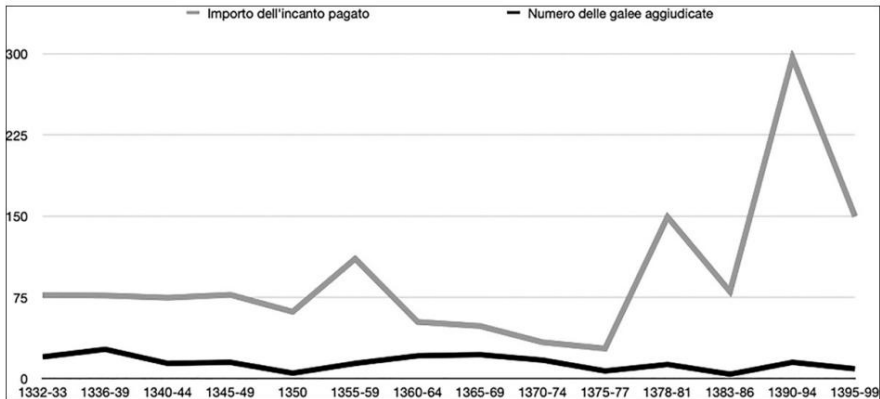
Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 374

Table 6. Number of Roman galleys awarded and amount of auctions in the period 1430-1452

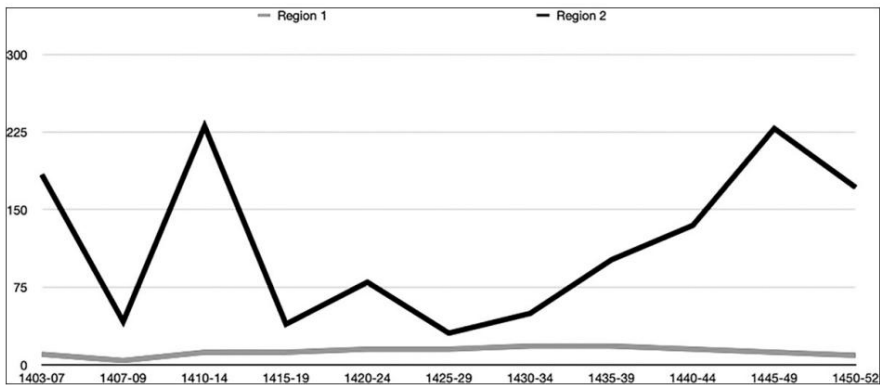
Anno	Numero delle galee aggiudicate	Importo medio dell'incanto	Totale dei noli pagati
1430-34	18	49,6	893
1435-39	18	101,5	1826,1
1440-44	15	134,8	2021,5
1445-49	12	228,4	2741
1450-52	9	171,4	1542,6

Source: Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto*, p. 374

Graph 1. Comparison between the curve of average auctions and the number of Roman galleys sold in the 14th century



Graph 2. Comparison between the curve of average auctions and the number of Roman galleys sold in the 15th century



2. Coinage

Table 1. Relationship between Byzantine hyperpero and Venetian money in the 13th century

Anno	Luogo di emissione	Iperperi	Soldi veneziani
1226	Costantinopoli	1	34 e 8 denari
1228	Rialto	1	38
1228	Modone/Corone	1	35
1274	Modone/Corone	1	26

Table 2. Weight of the large Venetian in grams: 1211-1311

Periodo (doge)	Peso
1192-1205, Enrico Dandolo	2,18
1205-1229, Pietro Ziani	2,22
1229-1249, Iacopo Tiepolo	2,16
1249-1253, Marino Morosini	2,13
1253-1268, Ranieri Zeno	2,14
1268-1275, Lorenzo Tiepolo	2,11
	2,16
	2,01
1275-1280, Iacopo Contarini	2,14
1280-1289, Giovanni Dandolo	2,04
	2,18
1289-1311, Pietro Gradenigo	2,14

Source: Vogel, *Monies, Markets and Finance*, p. 472

Table 3. Ratio between gold and silver in Venice between the end of the 13th and the mid-13th century 14th century

Years	Quantity of silver per unit of gold
1284	10.6-11.3
1285	10.9-11.1
1296	12.9
1297	13.1
1301	13.4
1303-5	13
1308	14.2
1318	14.2
1324	13.9
1328	14.1
1342	15.2

Table 4. Trend of the value of the sour compared to the sour in the second mid-14th century

Year	High/harsh ratio 1374-75	Weight of sour in gr. silver
1=139.25 1381-82 1=142		1.57
1391 1=150 1399		1.54
1=193 1409 1=200		1.46
		1.13
		1.09

Table 5. Weight changes of the silver dirham in the Ilkhanate after Ghazan reforms

Periodo	Peso in grammi	Variazione in negativo	Standard (%)
Ghazan-Uljaitu (1295-1313)	2,16	-	-
Uljaitu (1313-1216)	1,99	0,17	7,8
Abu Said (1316-1329)	1,85	0,14	7,4
Abu Said (1329-1332)	1,62	0,23	12,4
Abu Said (1332-1335)	1,44	0,18	11,1

Source: Smith, *The silver currency*, p. 18

Table 6. Equivalence between supreme silver and harsh baricate of Gazaria

Year	Quantity of sour barricaded for a sum
1290	120
1333	150
1340ca	190

Source: Balard, *La Romania génoise*, vol. 2, p. 660

Table 7. Equivalence between silver summit and Gazaria sour new

Year	Quantity of barricaded bitters for a sum of silver
1344 50	
1374-75 139	
1381-82 142	
1386-87 145*	—
1391 150	
1399 193	
1409 200**	—

* Up to a maximum of 172

** Up to a maximum of 237

Source: Balard, *La Romania génoise*, vol. 2, pp. 660-661

3. Weights, measures and taxation of goods in the Mongol Empire

Table 1. General equivalences of weights and measures in Tana according to Pegolotti

Unit of measure	Equivalence
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1 cantaro 100 rolls; 5 mene; 150 lb large Genoese
 1 pound large Genoese 20 rolls; 12 pieces (i.e. 26.47g for one piece)
 1 pound thin Genoese 12 oz
 1 sum 45 essays

Table 2. General equivalences in Tabriz according to Pegolotti

Unit of measure	Equivalence with Venice
100 menas	300 pounds thin (1 pound thin was equal to 0.3012 kg)
1 menas of silk	6 and $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds thin (1.88kg)
Indigo	125 lbs slim
100 linen fathoms	110 peaks

Table 3. Correspondence of measurement units between Tana and Venice

Unità di misura	A Venezia	Tana	Tipologia di merce
Picco	125 braccia	100 braccia	Tessuti
Mena	6 libbre, 2 once	6 libbre	Seta
Mena	1=8 libbre sottili	1=156 libbre sottili	Spezie (pepe, zenzero, lacca), corallo
Mazzo	5 libbre sottili	10	Oro filato
Botte	3 bigonce	1	Vino

Table 4. Correspondence of measurement units between Saraj, Astrakhan and Venice

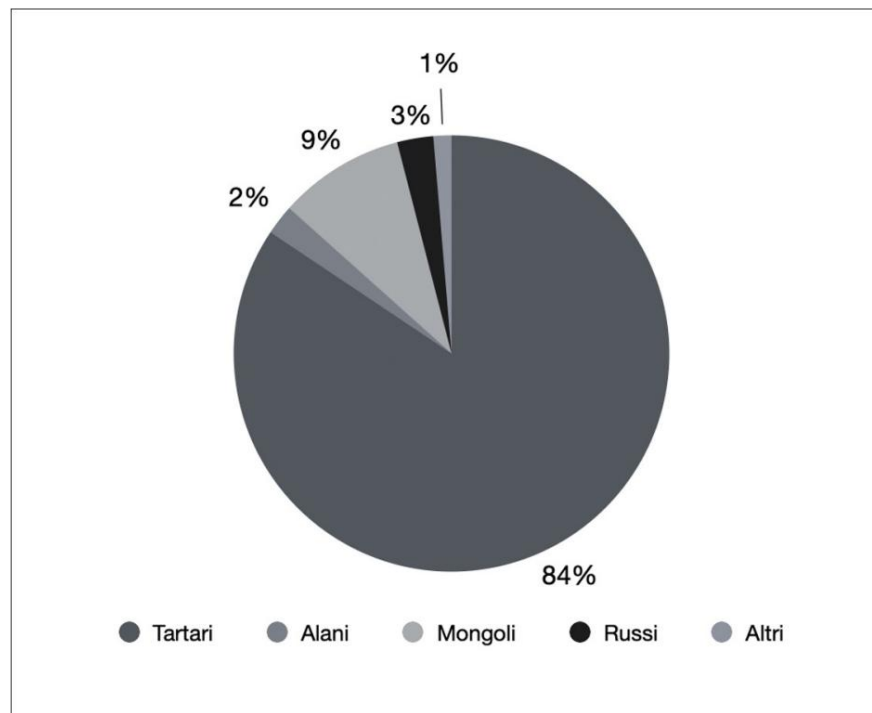
Unità di misura	A Saraj e Astrachan	A Venezia	Tipologia di merce
Picco	100	118 braccia	Tessuti
Mina	1	6 libbre, 2 once	Seta
Mina	20 (1 cantaro)	1=8 libbre sottili	Spezie (pepe, zenzero, lacca), corallo
Mazzo	1	$\frac{1}{2}$ libbra sottile	Oro filato
Botte	1	1	Vino
Risma	1	1	Carta
Libbra grossa		1=5 libbre	Metallo (ferro, stagno, rame, cinabro) miele

Table 5. Equivalences of a mina and the Genoese pounds according to Pegolotti

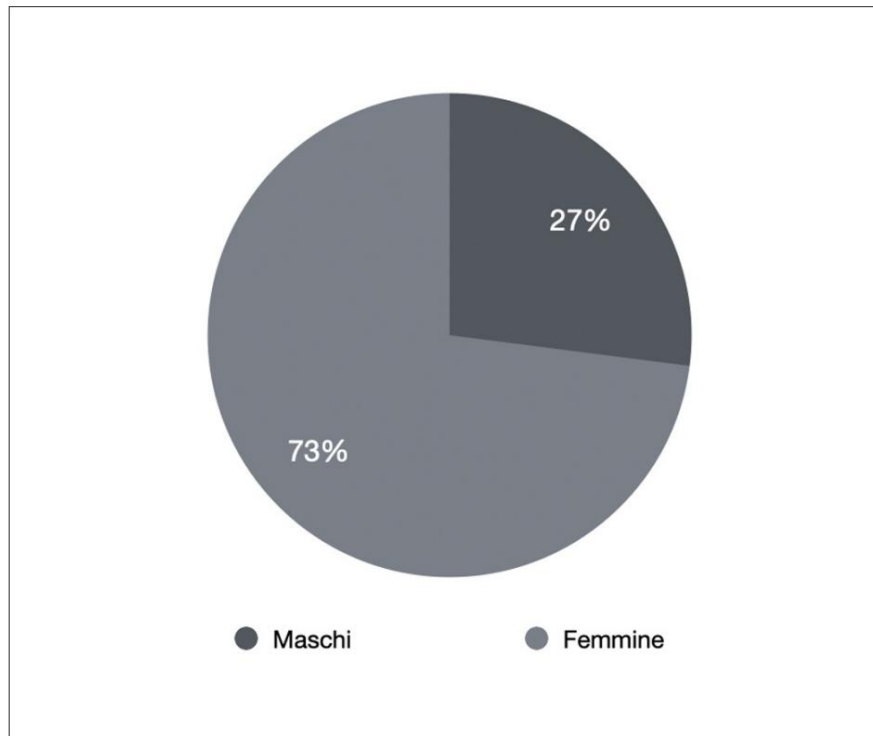
Saraj	6 pounds, 2 ounces
Urgench	3 pounds, 9 ounces
Utrar	3 pounds, 9 ounces
Almaligh	2 pounds, 8 ounces
Ganzhou	2 lbs

4. Slave trafficking in Tana between the 14th and 15th centuries

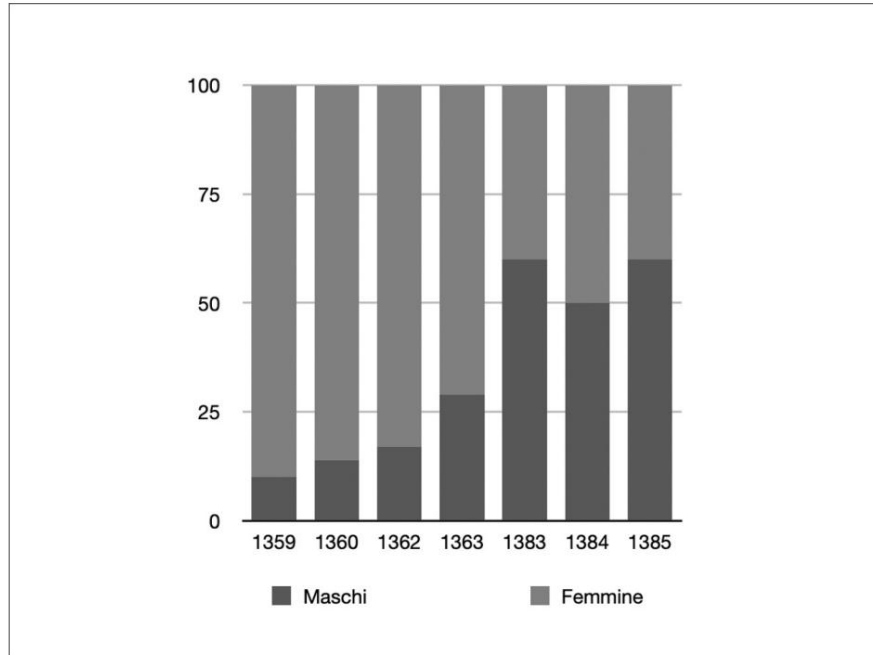
Graph 1. Origin of the slaves treated in Tana in the 14th century (1359-1385)



Graph 2. Gender division of slaves treated in Tana in the 14th century: total (1359-1385)



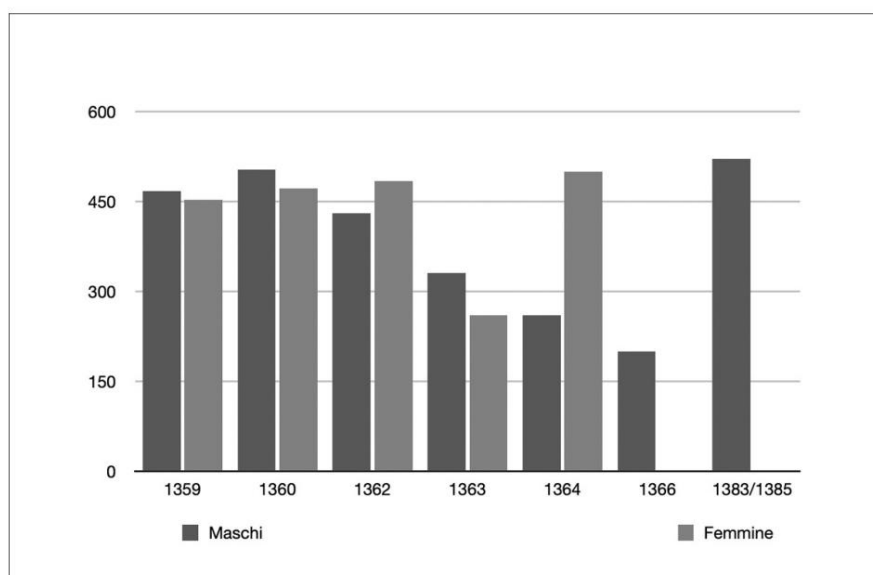
Graph 3. Gender division of slaves treated in Tana in the 14th century (in percentage)



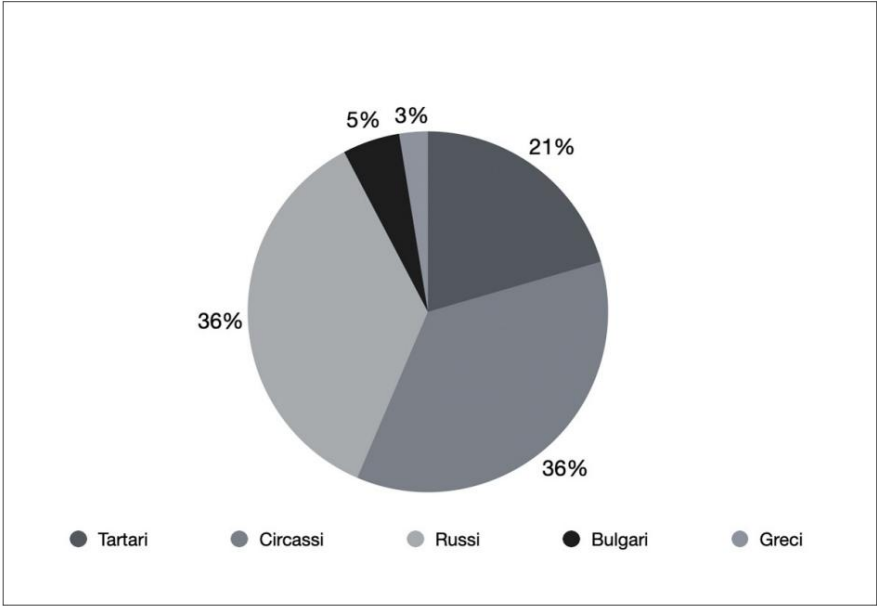
Graph 4. Average age of slaves by gender in the period 1359-1363



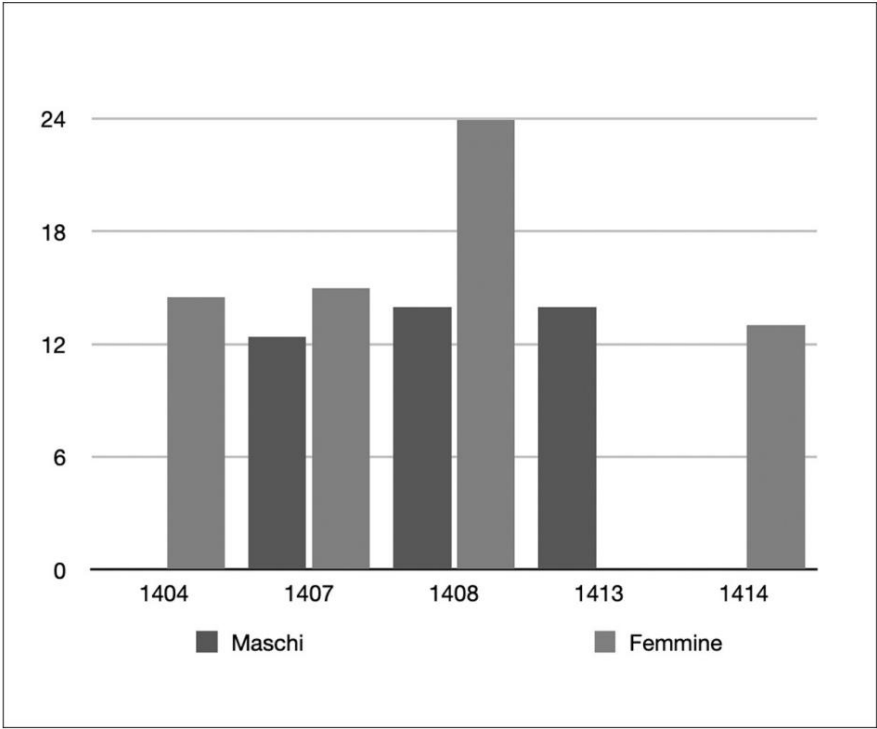
Graph 5. Average price of slaves in the 14th century (in terms)



Graph 6. Origin of slaves in the period 1404-1415



Graph 7. Average age of slaves by gender in the period 1404-1415



5. The treaty between Venice and Abu Said of 22 December 1320* [_](#)

This is the example of the commandments of Monsayt emperor habundi for the noble homo miser Michiel Dolphyno ambaxador for miser the doxe et pr the municipality of Venexia made by praying thousand three hundred and twentieth of the month of December of the XXIJ excando:

1. *First*, that all the Venetians and ours no force be made against them. And let no pedazo, no tamtaulazo, no tomaga beyond the ancient custom be taken nor lachi for any chaxone.
2. *Item*, that no city or place of our Empire our Veniciani no may be forced to decide not to sell their goods without their will, but let the tomagazi of that city or place be kept safe, when our Venetian wants to go with his stuff, or send it elsewhere, to that Venetian he must give lozonas wing soa will.
3. *Item*, that tatauli, charauli, and podegeri del chamin should take from our Venetians only the right right while, without any force to do to them.
4. *Item*, that in all parts of our Empire our Venetians or Venetians will sell their property, that the lordship and tammogazi of that place will be kept from those of defender valor and aid. And similarly to ensure that he is fully satisfied with the person who sold them.
5. *Item*, that in all parts of our Empire, one or more of its charavane passed, and theft or crime was committed by someone, that the lordship, tatauli, charauli and zente of that place, or both of those districts are restricted from cherzar (zerchar) the theft or damage finger and to find it in its entirety, when it was denounced by our Venetian fingers. And if such crime or theft is not found, or indeed the robbers do not show themselves, let us hold the finger of theft or crime to our Venetians.
6. *Item*, that in all parts of our Empire, or the so-called charavane or merchants and merchants, can feed their three beasts without any choice. And above all no one can contradict.
7. *Item*, if any muzurcho will bring stuff from some of our mechanic Venetians, no person of our Empire can despise the muzurich finger nor impair for reason of any debt, nor for any other rexon in the end, that the muzurich finger had not complied with the journey of our Venetian fingers.
8. *Item*, if any large horse was found owned by one of ours Venetian or whoever washed them, that such and such a Venetian cannot be molested, except if in the evening he took the shaved finger from him, clearly showing that the shaved finger was wide.
9. *Item*, if any of our Veentian died in our Empire, that no de

those who bow the scorn, no other person can nor should be within the possession of the goods of the one, who was dead in any reason to ask in zo, except only mo lazor of the Venetian fingers.

10. *Item*, if it were so, that some Venetian sinned or quarreled cometese in my Empire, and that Venician wanted, what judge was held in our court, that no lordship, nor other person can ask for reason from that Venician, nor raxon far, breast only the great circle of the Imperial finger.
11. *Item*, that no one can ask or take a gift or signal to any of our Venician, nor to chalamazi, nor to famine nor to any rabuto ask, nor can he take for that caxon. And from this place let the mazor of the Venetian fingers be credited, and of all the chalamazis and family members of their wing I know the word.
12. *Item*, that of all sins and questions that were from Franco to Franco, no lordship or other person can enter into zo, slave their mazor, since their mazori can do justice and justice according to their custom.
13. *Item*, that none of our Venetians can bear pain, nor worry about each other in our Empire.
14. *Item*, that no baron, lordship, or official can ask from ours
Venetians will not rob anyone for any money, nor will they force those who go to see them, nor will they present them against their will.
15. *Item*, that each taraulo to pay is safe to accompany or do
accompany or for some badriga at the will of all the Venetian merchants along the way. And if you cross them, don't forget the damage if the damage is received.
16. *Item*, which in all parts, or our Venetians wanted, can pass here
place them plaxe, cho le soe charavane.
17. *Item*, if our Latin friars wanted to make a place for their prayer in some city or place of the Empire, they can do it, and no one person can tell them anything.
18. *Item*, that no one can be affected by buying and selling in any part.
19. *Item*, that no bazariot, nor any other person who has to give to any of our Venicians, can be defended for any debt, which he has to give to others, nor for any other reason.
20. *Given* that none of our Venicians, neither from Chalamazi nor from any other person, can be asked for any reason, nor did I make them pay any dais, nor those that are paid in the Imperial Finger for the Emperor, nor for other person.
21. *Item*, which none of the merchandise from Venician to Francho, except for it, should be go crazy.

22. *Item*, that no Venecian who makes wine to drink, does not drink any wine.
23. *Item*, that any Vencian cannot be forced to pay toll, unless in that place the or it is recoie.
24. *Item*, which for any debt or belief made, or which was paid for some of our Venitian in the part of the Empire, that it should not be included in some other of our Venitian, in the goods of those, are only what will do the debt and the assets thereof are obligated to the debt, or credit.
25. *Item*, that any heart of Veniciani who comes or goes, should not be hindered either by behavior or by intention.
26. *Item*, that each melicho and Siena be ready to give help and favor to our consul of Venexia, who will call them to do whatever thing they want to their Venetians, or to their charavane or for each other way, that the consul finger wanted to recall those or soa zente.
27. *Item*, that no fault or any other thing, which any one does, whether at sea, as on earth, nothing can be done to any person, nor to one person for one's sake, nor to one's partner for another's sake, nor to one's companion for another's companion, who spreads the whole house in the house, nor to any of his own people, unless it is to the very person who do it.
28. *Item*, that he can have as many sanseri as he wants. And those who will want it and that no one can say against it.
29. *Item*, cum zo sia, che miser lo mesazo said, that one of ours died Venician, who had the name Sir Francescho da Chanale, in a place, called Arisenga, and that their goods were taken away by one, who by name Badradin Lulu, wants to miser the emperor, who by sending miser the mesazo so meso, who let the said goods be returned and given to the predicted month.

And whoever does anything against these above-mentioned things must be dead by word of the emperor's finger.

* *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I, pp. 173-176.

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